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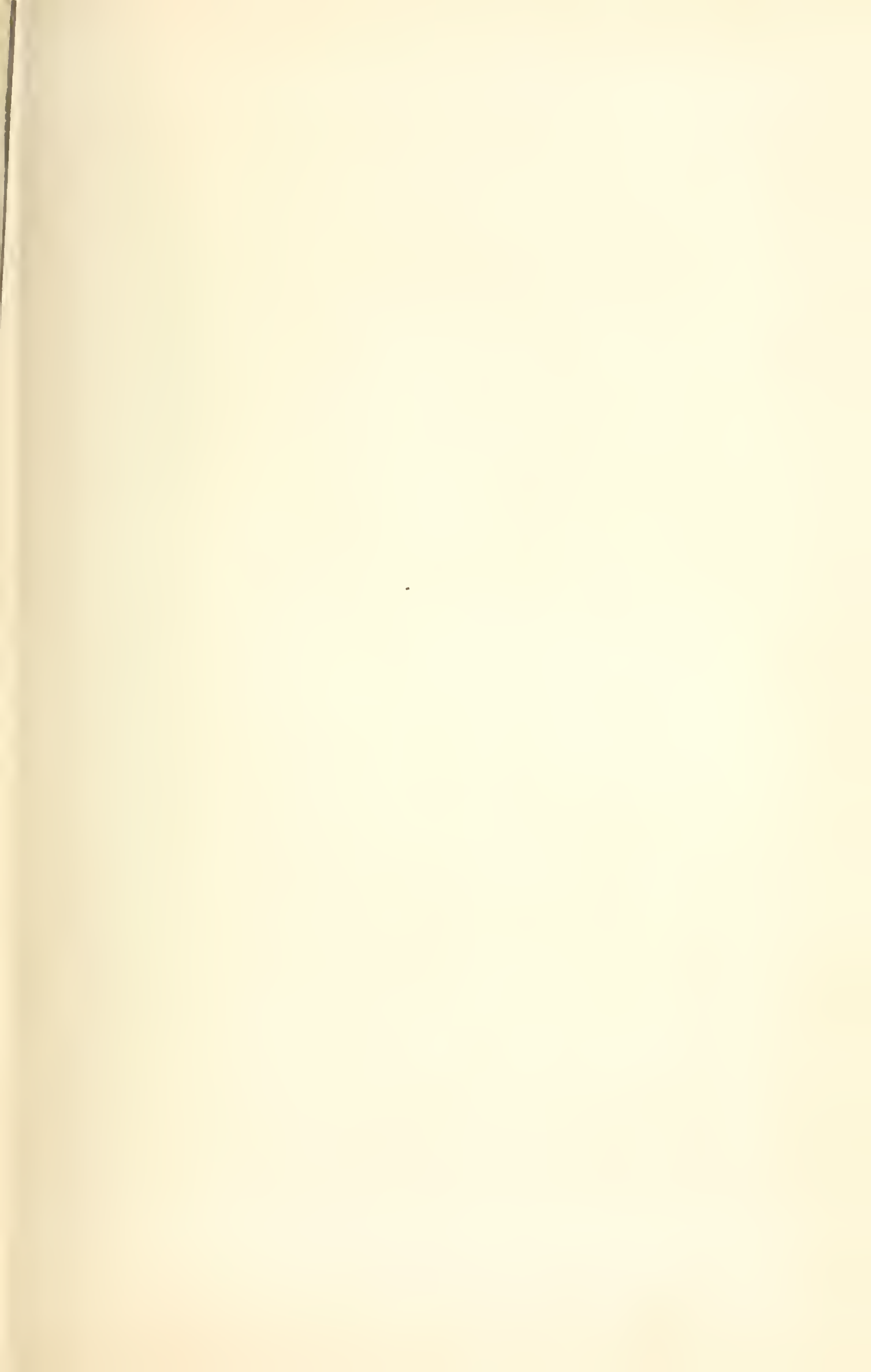

THE TALES

OF

JOHN OLIVER HOBBES

SOME EMOTIONS AND A MORAL *A STUDY IN TEMPTATIONS*
THE SINNER'S COMEDY *A BUNDLE OF LIFE*

WITH PORTRAIT BY
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SOME EMOTIONS AND A MORAL

Some Emotions and a Moral.

Part I.

I.

"IDEALS, my dear Golightly, are the root of every evil. When a man forgets his ideals he may hope for happiness, but not till then."

"And if he has none to forget?"

"That he has none to forget," said the first speaker slowly, "simply means that he has not yet been disappointed."

"You think he cannot escape them?"

"I know he cannot. Of course I am speaking of the Thinking Man—not a human machine."

The man who had been addressed as Golightly bent back in his chair, and did not reply immediately. He had a pleasant, rest-giving face—rest-giving in its strong suggestion that he was not the man to under-estimate his fellow-creatures, or himself.

"You say that a Thinking Man cannot escape ideals," he said at last, "and yet you add he cannot be happy till he forgets them. Is not that a little hard on the Thinking Man?"

"Is not everything hard on him?" said the other. "Who can use his eyes and not wonder whether it

may not be better to live a satisfied hog than a dissatisfied philosopher? Some days I have almost succeeded in not feeling—almost persuaded myself that after all there is nothing either good or honest—almost doubted my own sincerity in hoping I was mistaken. I suppose that because it has only been a case of 'almost' I have not felt happier."

"Everything depends on what you call being happy," said Golightly. "The word 'happiness' seems to play the writing on the wall to each man's Belshazzar, and each Belshazzar thinks himself a Daniel. From your point of view, Provence, I should say it simply meant the craving for a new sensation. As for myself—at the risk of appearing frigid—I think there is much to take hold of in the Greek notion: that man is happiest to whom from day to day no evil happens."

Provence rose from his chair and began to pace the floor.

"If I could tell you what I meant by happiness," he said, "I should not want it. I have no pretty talent for definitions. There are some men, I know, who can analyze their first love and wonder with Hume if their passion is the appetite for generation sandwiched between the appreciation for beauty and a generous kindness. They can reduce their God to a diagram and their emotions to a system. If that is philosophy, I have not the first makings of a philosopher. But I know this: I cannot be happy merely because I am not unhappy. It is this unending evenness, this everlasting dulness, which overwhelms me. If I may have nothing better, give me seven devils: one could not be dull with seven devils!"

"You have been overworking," said Golightly, "and this morbidity is the result. All your life you have been zealously bottling your spirits, and now you complain because they are stale. You have always avoided sympathy, and yet you grumble because you are out of touch with the world."

"Sympathy," said Provence, "is the one emotion which seems most perfect as it becomes most animal: in its human aspect it too often lapses into the moralizing grandmother. Animals don't ask questions and cannot answer back. A dog can put more soul into a look than a kind friend can talk in an hour."

He had ceased pacing the floor, and was now sitting in a dark corner of the room. In the twilight Golightly could see the outline of his figure, and the nervous movement of his firm, strong hands.

"Provence," he said, "I have often thought—I know it is a delicate subject—that if you could meet some nice, really nice girl—women are so clever at understanding dispositions——" Here he found the subject not only delicate, but too difficult. He stopped short.

"Girls do not delight me," said Provence; "they appear to have no intermediate stage between the guileless chicken and the coquettish hen. My ideal woman is a combination of the Madonna and the Wood-nymph—with the Wood-nymph element predominating. As for marriage, I fear it is a sadly overrated blessing. Wives are either too much devil or too much angel. Fancy eating bacon every morning of one's life with a blameless creature who was dangling one-quarter of the way from heaven

and three-quarters from earth! I should die of respect for her."

"And what if she were too much devil?"

"I should love her horribly," said Provence. "That is the worst of devils—they are so entirely adorable. I don't say I should be particularly anxious to make one the mother of my children; and that I know is the amiable and perfectly correct ambition of the average young man averagely enamoured. But even were I so minded—which the gods forbid—I doubt extremely whether a devil would appreciate the kind intention. There is nothing remarkably exhilarating in the prospect of a large family."

Golightly, whose sentiments were more proper than intense, laughed with a twinging conscience. He had never seen Provence in this mood before, and felt a little irritable that there were still some unexplored possibilities in his friend's character. He was not certain, either, that the possibilities hinted at were absolutely satisfactory.

"I don't quite see what you're driving at," he said. "None of this sounds in the least like you."

"I dare say not. You may know a man for twenty years, and in the twenty-first year he will do something which will make your twenty years' experience count for nought. Then you say, 'I should never have expected this from A.' Just as if A would have expected it himself. Men astonish themselves far more than they astonish their friends."

"That may be true of some natures," said Golightly; "but I confess I prefer a character one can swear by."

"A person of that kind is useful, but just a shade

monotonous," said Provence. "Lord! Lord! what a charm is there in variety!"

"Ideas of that sort are very apt to land one in difficulties. You might as well cling to a slippery rock for the fun of falling off. If you were to take a short holiday you would probably come back with saner notions."

"I believe you are getting to the bottom of the matter," said Provence. "I certainly do want change of some sort. I have eaten my fill of chops and tomato sauce: I am hankering for locusts and wild honey and a wilderness."

"In the wilderness one is apt to be tempted of the devil," said Golightly, half under his breath.

Provence laughed. "Man is at best a learned pig," he said, "and the pig nature has its promptings. It will root for truffles in Sahara or Paradise." Then with characteristic abruptness he wished Golightly good-night, and left the house.

When Golightly went down into the drawing-room—for he and Provence had been talking in a small room known to the housemaid as the library—he found three ladies there and a gentleman. The elder of the ladies was rather stout and had a Wellington nose: she wore a mantle, and a black bonnet which consisted of two velvet strings and an impossible jet butterfly which wobbled on an invisible wire; her gown was black silk. She reclined in her chair, sipped her tea, and nibbled her muffin, with that air of combined condescension and embarrassment which is usually characteristic of the moneyed relative. The lady at the tea-tray was slim, smooth-cheeked, and perhaps forty; she had a quantity of mouse-coloured

hair, which she wore very elaborately puffed; her face was pleasing and her expression what is called lady-like—that is to say, it did not betray any one characteristic too strongly, except that of polite acquiescence in generally accepted doctrines. Her husband—who was the gentleman present—considered her a devilish "distanggay"-looking woman. As for himself, he was chiefly remarkable for a pair of long legs, which seemed rather insecurely attached to his body, and a very marvellous laugh—a laugh which started with a gentle gurgle apparently from his toes, and burst from his lips with the roar of a Niagara. So far as mere noise went it was admirable; but there was never anything less mirthful. He was Captain Archibald Golightly, late of the —th Hussars, and brother to the lady with the bonnet.

The third lady—who looked about twenty-seven—had a nose which somehow suggested low comedy, and a plaintive-looking mouth. She bore a certain resemblance, particularly about the eyes, which were large, clear, and emotionless—singularly like glass marbles—to the lady in the bonnet. She was, in fact, her daughter.

"Did I hear Godfrey's voice in the hall?" said Mrs. Golightly, as her step-son entered. She was the captain's second wife. "Why didn't you make him come in?"

"He's in one of his moods," said George—for that was the young man's name.

"Are you speaking of Godfrey Provence?" said the lady with the bonnet. "Do tell me about him. Does there seem any prospect of his getting on?"

"He's still writing," said the Captain.

"He can't be doing much—one never hears of him," she said.

"Provence is aiming at rather a high standard," said George; "he is not easily contented with his work. It's the hardest thing in the world to get him to publish a line."

The young woman with the low-comedy nose looked at him gratefully from under the rim of her hat. He wondered why.

"I know the kind of thing," said the Bonnet. "Literature is all very well if you make a regular business of it, but the moment you regard it as an art, you're practically done for. We all know you'll never earn a penny."

"But Godfrey's a clever chap," said the Captain; "he must be clever, you know, Sarah—everybody says so."

"What's the use of being clever if you're never heard of?" said Sarah, who was no other than Lady Hemingway, widow of Sir James Hemingway, Baronet.

"Well, of course, his style is what they call severe," said the Captain; "he's got the artistic temperament, and writes rather above the heads of ordinary folk."

"There's a good deal of human nature in him all the same," put in George.

Lady Hemingway looked suspicious. She was not at all sure that human nature was proper: she was certain it was not well-bred: in connection with the artistic temperament it was even alarming.

"Does he write things one could have on one's drawing-room table?" she said. "I consider that is

the true test of a book—would one wish to have it in one's drawing-room ?"

"His article in last month's *Waverley* was beautiful," said her daughter, who blushed painfully after she had spoken.

"Grace reads all the learned Reviews," explained Lady Hemingway; "she goes in for Higher Education, you know. But," she went on, "does Godfrey make much by his writing? That is the point. I know he has his mother's two hundred and fifty, but no one could call that an income. He'll have to marry money—so far as I can see."

"I'm afraid he wouldn't do that," said Mrs. Golightly; "he has very peculiar views about marriage. You see Constance brought him up almost entirely herself. I think he would marry a girl without a penny, if he took a fancy to her."

"How wrong to bring up a boy with such notions," said Lady Hemingway, "and after her own bitter experience."

"She lived very happily with her husband, you know," said Mrs. Golightly. "I really think they were attached to each other—quite to the end. Don't you find that artists, and musicians, and literary people seem to feel more than those with more—well, more every-day pursuits ?"

"Their feelings are always getting them into trouble, I know that," said Lady Hemingway, "and they are generally dreadfully poor. Look at Constance !"

"She never seemed to mind her poverty," said Mrs. Golightly; "she bore it quite happily. Sometimes—it sounds ridiculous—I almost envied her,

although I can assure you—but pray don't let it go further—it was very seldom they could afford a joint for dinner."

"She brought it all on herself," said Lady Hemingway; "with her figure she might have married very well indeed. By the bye, does Godfrey resemble his mother?"

The Captain shook his head mournfully. "He's an ugly chap," he said, "but you get used to him—I'll say that."

"Ah!" said Lady Hemingway. "Grace never told me that. She has met him several times at 'At Homes,' and at one thing and another. All I could get out of her was that he had a nice voice and looked powerful—which of course would apply to a coal-heaver."

Every one looked at Grace, who again blushed.

"I should like to be kind to him," continued Lady Hemingway, "because of poor darling Constance. I will send him a card for my Thursdays. Men are always useful."

"Godfrey doesn't shine in society," said the Captain, "and it's mere waste to put a good dinner before him."

"What a strange thing! And his father was such a gentlemanly man!" said Lady Hemingway.

"Godfrey's rum," observed the Captain.

"He's a dear fellow when you know him," said Mrs. Golightly; "of course he can be very trying, but he's so kind if one has a headache!"

"Poets have always a touch of the molly-coddle," said her sister-in-law. Then she rose, murmured she must be going, and kissed the air at an angle of forty-five degrees from Mrs. Golightly's cheek. "Good-

bye, dear," she said; "don't forget the 24th, and bring your music. People are singing a lot of Schubert just now—all in German, you know. German is so quaint. And you haven't given me Godfrey's address," she added.

"Twelve, Achilles Villas, Shepherd's Bush," said the Captain.

"Shepherd's Bush!" said Lady Hemingway; "you must mean Bedford Park. There was some quite well-known literary people there—the sort who sometimes ask you to dinner."

"Godfrey is at Shepherd's Bush," repeated the Captain, gloomily.

"How dreadful! Pray don't tell any one outside the family," and with more adieux and more murmurings about the 24th, she and her daughter went out.

Harriet Golightly watched them drive away in their brougham.

"She might offer to take me for a turn in the Park occasionally," she said.

"Sarah's a selfish cat," said the Captain, "and always was. But she'd give all she's worth for your head of hair."

His wife did not find this speech so consoling as he had hoped.

"They make wigs wonderfully well now," she said, "and they keep up ever so much better than one's own hair."

"Is Sarah what you'd call well-preserved?" said the Captain, after a pause. "It's quite two years since I've seen her, and I fancy she's gone off."

"She looks every day of her age," said Harriet, "and that must be fifty—for she's older than Constance."

"Poor Connie!" sighed Archibald, "she *was* a fool to marry that old drybones Provence."

"Your family need not have cut her for it, all the same," said his wife. "I have always thought—and I would say it with my dying breath—that she was treated very badly."

"I don't know about that," said Archibald; "we were all very well brought up and accustomed to good society—you must own it was rather a come-down to have her marry a foreigner, and a professional into the bargain. The man actually gave lessons; and you may say what you like, but at that time that was considered—well—an inferior sort of thing to do."

"He was a gentleman by birth," said Harriet; "you can't deny that."

"I don't believe much in French families," said her husband; "no one ever knows anything about 'em so far as I can make out. Every beastly little Frenchman one meets can't be descended from the lost Dauphin or the Huguenots. I call it dam cheek on their part to expect an educated Englishman to believe it. Besides, what's a Huguenot? I thought most of 'em were chopped up."

"Don't," said his wife.

"I dare say Provence was all right—I hope so, at all events, for the sake of the family."

"He was an interesting-looking man."

"Interesting! Yes, I suppose women would call a man like that—all eyes and baggy trousers—interesting."

"Poor creature! Well, he's dead now, and so is Constance."

"Gawd knows what's to become of Godfrey. What

with genius from his father—(thank Gawd I'm not a genius!)—and any amount of moonstruck sentimentality from his mother, he's pretty sure to come to grief. What do you say, George?"

"Well," said George, "in a crisis, some of the Golightly common sense might come to the rescue."

But here the dinner-gong sent the good Captain's thoughts into another and more congenial channel.

"Do I smell grouse?" said he; "because I particularly wanted those birds to hang for another ten days."

II.

"MY search for new worlds," wrote Provence to George Golightly a few days later, "begins at this small village—not a hundred miles from Charing Cross—which I have named the End of all Things. It is described on local guide-posts as Little Speenham. There is a church, a public-house, and a dissenting chapel—one evil brings another—and the rustic maid abounds, a creature of large feet, wide smiles, and limited innocence. This, however, in parenthesis. My quarters might be worse, and are as comfortable as a respectable woman with an unnecessary husband, a voracious child and a barn-yard can make them. When she is not feeding the husband and stirring pap for the babe she mixes pabulum for the pigs: in her leisure she does the washing and prepares food for me. What an existence! The other day I asked her if she did not think that the five wise may have lived to envy the five foolish virgins. She looked at me—as only a woman can look—and mournfully winked! No heroine flopping in elegant collapse and disillusion could match the eloquence of that wink. Sublime!

"I can step from my room on to a lawn where yellow ducklings, a lame hen and some middle-aged cats gambol in imperfect amiability; beyond the lawn, through a gate, is a duck-pond—you walk a little way and behold! another gate—it is generally open—you pass through and find yourself in the poultry-yard.

This yard is by no means uninstructive, and lacks but one thing to reach Nineteenth Century civilization—the Divorce Court. I must not forget the kitchen-garden—rich with gooseberry bushes, mignonette, apple trees and potatoes ; odorous with world-weary cabbage and patent fertilizer. A modern Eden, with a dash of the commonplace, and a clothes line extended from the Tree of Knowledge to the Tree of Life ; Eve with a bad complexion and no figure—or too much—to speak of, scrubs the kitchen floor and has small leisure for the Tempter ; Satan (your obedient servant) loses himself in a vast yawn and is certainly in no mood to tempt ; whilst Adam snores the sleep of the unphilosophic, the robust and the over-fed, on the kitchen chair bedstead. To write country idylls one should live in town. . . .

"The air now is delightful—fresh-washed by yesterday's rain and dried by this morning's sun. What a Queen of Washerwomen is Nature! That is a prosaic simile, I know, but it suits my surroundings. It is only a journalist or a genius who can write of ambrosia with his mouth full, nay, poor devil, perhaps only half full, of porridge. I shall try and endure this for a week. Shall I ever learn to bear gracefully what is good for me? ever feel—on the analogy of Virtue being its own reward (a darksome saying *en passant*)—that the Uncomfortable, the Irksome, the Infinitely Tedious and all the phases of Dead-levelism are better for me than all the other things (thank Heaven, we may leave them to the imagination) which I am not desperate enough—yet—to hope for? But—it is encouraging to remember that there are few things in life which do not sooner or later admit a But—I

have had an adventure. This noon I started for a walk over the common with its big board of bye-laws lame in the leg but awful with penalties) and on to the high road. Then, for no other reason than my constitutional love for the crooked, I branched off into a winding lane. I must have walked ten minutes or more when I suddenly found myself facing a gate: curiosity or my guardian angel prompted me to look over it. I saw a small, old-fashioned garden, a broad, flat house of the bungalow type, and a girl sitting on the lawn. At first I noticed that she was bored and what women call untidy; then that she was mysteriously, surprisingly, uncomfortably beautiful. I suppose I stared too hard—she looked up, caught my eye, blushed, tugged her dress, which was certainly short, over her ankles and tried to smooth her hair; for she wore no hat. Well, it was clearly impossible for me to stand any longer at the gate; it was equally impossible for me to walk away—at least from my point of view. I took off my hat, endeavoured to look innocent, and touched the gate. *L'inconnue* rose from her chair, and with one more tug at her gown walked towards me. 'I beg your pardon,' said I, 'but can you direct me to East Sheerwell? I think I have lost my way.' She began to smile, and looked steadily beyond me. 'You are quite in the wrong direction,' she said; 'East Sheerwell is ten miles from here and lies at your back.' I thanked her, took off my hat again, and went on my way rejoicing. Is that all? you will say. Have I not used the word 'rejoicing,' and applied it to myself? Don't laugh at me—I am laughing at myself enough for both of us.—Yours, G. P.

"P.S.—I have forgotten something. Whom should

I meet at the station the day I came down but old Heathcote—the Honourable and Reverend. Do you remember him? It appears he has exchanged rectories with the local apostle, and is down here with Lady Theodosia Gore-Jones and his two daughters. He insisted that I should dine with them to-morrow and stay over Sunday. I have never met any of the women, but they are 'fond of music,' and 'read a little Greek—in a girlish way.' God be merciful to me a sinner! He also introduced me to a lady he was very much assisting into a chariot and pair—an elderly person who shows me what the British Matron might have been before she was shocked. Her name is Cargill, and her husband is a baronet. Into what distinguished company have I fallen! You may depend the devil is not far off in *this* wilderness."

When Provence had finished this letter he gave it to his landlady for the post-boy, and left the house with the air of a man who had some more definite object in view than a mild jostling for the digestion. It was evening—perhaps nine o'clock, and that peculiar stillness reigned over all things which in the country marks the closing in of day. The moon was bright, the air fresh. Provence felt that he had every excuse for tingling with the joy of being alive, and that his scepticism for one night at least might be the light scum on a deep surface of sentimentality and unspoken quotations from the poets. For one moment he was tempted to think he might lapse into poetry himself: that is to say, if his thoughts would only shape themselves into something more definite than a variety of agreeable impressions which would no more bear

analysis—much less the writing on paper—than the sheen of the moon on the duck-pond. Meanwhile he walked on, gradually quickening his steps until he reached the winding lane he had already explored that morning. Then he slackened his pace, and with the not unpleasant consciousness that he was behaving more youngly than he had ever imagined possible in his youth, he smiled kindly at his own folly till he gained a green gate. Here he stopped short, for She was standing there, a vision of loveliness and white muslin—a fair enough sight to make any man's heart (provided that the cook and the counting-house had not reduced that organ to an inferior kind of liver), stand still. She did not seem surprised to see him, but with an indescribable movement of grace and confidence leant a little further over the gate, looked him straight in the eyes for a bewildering moment, and—looked away. The girl was, no doubt, as Provence had said in his letter, uncomfortably beautiful: attractive with a beauty which other women might or might not admire, but would at all events rather not see in a rival. There were faults in her face. The chin, in spite of its dimple, might have been rounder, her mouth with all its fresh redness was a little too wavering, her eyebrows were a shade too straight. She had wonderful hair, neither auburn, nor gold, nor brown, but a suggestion of all three; brown eyes, with the unclouded frankness of a shallow pond—putting aside the unpleasant reflection that a shallow pond may be deceptive; a skin of unusual fairness, and a poise of the head which was positively royal—royal in that sense which, in spite of human experience, human sentiment with that longing to idealize the

real (a longing which, by the bye, is more apt to show itself in definitions than deeds)—would fain give the word. In form she was tall and slender—rather too slender, perhaps, for statuesque symmetry.

But before Provence could persuade himself that there was a something in her expression which did not at all events forbid him to draw nearer, a window was heard to open, and a loud voice, feminine, aristocratic, and shrill, drowned the sweetness of the nightingale, "Cynthia! Cynthia!"

The girl sighed, smiled with ineffable graciousness on heaven and earth, glanced at the mortal on the opposite side of the road, and disappeared in the shadow of the garden. Provence felt that the night had grown dark.

But the moon was still shining upon the duckpond.

III.

"Your father is most extraordinary," said Lady Theodosia to her niece, as they sat together on the lawn next morning. "He has invited a man to dinner this evening—a person who writes—and I am told nothing about it till this eleventh hour. Meanwhile I have given all my orders for the day, and Johnny has driven in to market. Your father cannot realize that I have other interests in life besides housekeeping. If I died to-morrow he would expect me to soar into heaven with the store-cupboard on my back."

Lady Theodosia Gore-Jones, third daughter of the Earl of Drumdrosset and widow of the late Admiral Sir Clyfford Gore-Jones, K.C.B., was rather above the average height, with a plump figure which her male acquaintance were wont to describe as "deuced neat." She had very black hair, which she wore parted in the middle and gathered in a knot at the nape of her neck. This simple fashion suited her admirably, and had proved useful on more than one occasion, for it is certainly difficult to believe hard things of a woman who looks like a Sainte Nitouche —in profile. Her nose was small and delicate—an eminently lady-like nose, with curved nostrils; her lips were thin, red, and firmly set—in her own idea chaste, in her late husband's, vixenish. Her skin—for a woman who owned to two and forty—was remarkably clear and fine.

"Who is the man?" said Cynthia.

"His name is Provence. I have heard of the creature—he is an Egyptologist, or a Dissenter, or something equally disagreeable. Heaven knows what the wretch talks about! I wonder if your father has a short, condensed sort of thing about Egypt in his library—one of those convenient books you can get up in half an hour. I cannot imagine what Percival sees in these learned, uncomfortable people—one never knows what to give them for dinner, they have such miserable digestions. . . . Of course—I knew there was something else. He wants me to ask the Cargills over to help the matter through. It is outrageous at such short notice. Your father has no notion of etiquette."

"And what is etiquette, after all?" said her niece.

"Etiquette, my dear, makes the difference between Man and the Brute Beast," and with that Lady Theodosia hurried—for she was energetic—into the house.

Cynthia waited till she had gone, and then moved her chair in a more direct line with her father's study, which led by French windows on to the lawn. She could then see him at his table. It was the Rector's day for writing his sermon. He was a man who liked system in all things: first because it was philosophical; secondly—and perhaps, in common with many theorists, his secondly was the salt of the whole—he had an idea that it was a nice, gentlemanly sort of thing to cultivate. But although the Hon. and Rev. Percival Heathcote could control his actions, his thoughts were amenable only to the impulse of the moment. Now impulsiveness formed the strongest

element in his character; the fact, therefore, that every Thursday morning at ten o'clock found him at his study table, and the further fact that his entire household was wrapped in stillness from that hour till luncheon time, lest a sound should stem the current of his eloquence, merely resulted in this:—if there was a day in the week when the sermon was *not* written, Thursday was that day. Only one person in the world knew this, however, and that was his daughter Cynthia. She, too, like her father, was impulsive, but she—seeing that she was a woman—saw no need to cultivate much besides her own will. "System," she once told her father, "is an excellent thing if one has no spirit, but spirit will accomplish in five minutes what system cannot do in as many centuries." Her father looked grave and shook his head, but loved her the more. He explained this apparent inconsistency to himself as the natural tenderness of a shepherd for the wandering lamb.

On this particular morning the Rector had taken his chair as usual, arranged his blotting-pad at precisely the right angle, drawn six sheets of writing paper from his desk, dipped his pen into the ink, and—looked through the open window and beyond the green lawn, and beyond that again to a garden seat where Cynthia—Cynthia in a cotton gown and a surprising hat, which the Rector, in his innocence, supposed was the fashion—sat with her aunt. He sighed, dipped his pen in the ink once more, and wrote his text very neatly at the top of his first sheet—"*It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.*" Then he looked up again, and beheld Lady Theodosia moving towards the kitchen garden. He hesitated a few

moments—or was he merely waiting till she was out of sight?—and finally walked to the window and whistled—softly, but with the ease and tunefulness of an accomplished whistler—the opening bars of a Chopin Nocturne. Cynthia lifted her head and laughed. It was a curious laugh, and meant all manner of things: among others, good health, considerable wickedness, and a fellow-feeling for the ungodly. She left her book—for she had been reading—and came towards him.

"It is a pity," she said, coming in at the window and seating herself in a low armchair, "that it is your sermon day, or we might have had some music."

There was just a shade of amiable malice in her tone. The Rector looked wistful. He had a nice touch for Chopin.

"I suppose Agatha is at home?" he said.

Agatha was his eldest daughter and the mainstay of his parish. He was, perhaps, somewhat afraid of Agatha, but she copied his sermons in a beautiful hand, was an adept at hunting references, and simply unequalled at tying a cravat.

"Yes, Agatha is at home," said Cynthia.

"I wonder if she is going out," sighed the Rector, allowing his fingers to wander Chopin-wise on the writing-table.

"She is designing morning-gowns for the poor heathen," said Cynthia. "She certainly won't stir out of the house to-day. But we can talk."

The Rector dropped his pen, stretched out his long, elegant legs, and leant back in his chair. He experienced a strange delight in hearing gossip, or talking it, on Thursdays.

"I want you to tell me," began Cynthia, "about the man who is coming to dinner. What does Aunt Theodosia mean by calling him an Egyptologist?"

"Provence the Egyptologist has been dead for years—this man is his son. To tell the truth, I don't know much about him, except that he is by way of being literary. I think he once wrote a poem—a pretty enough thing about despair and the soul and the function of art. Just what one would expect from the son of a French *savant* and an English woman with yearnings. His father—Professor Provence—was a very singular character, and had all manner of theories about women and the state of Ireland and papyri. The mother was one of the Golightlys—very decent family too: she was something of the British maid and a good deal of the *enfant terrible* when she married. I remember the marriage created a small sensation at the time; they were foolish enough to elope, and she was cut by her family. You see, Provence had no private income; he depended entirely on what he earned, and the Golightlys could hardly be expected to smile at an alliance of that kind—especially as he earned very little."

"But where did you meet the man who is coming to dinner," said Cynthia.

"Dobbs introduced him to me," said the Rector—"Dobbs of *The Present Age*. He thinks a lot of him—calls him the 'makings of a success,' and pays him for his contributions with something approaching liberality. Of course I could hardly do less than ask him to dinner when I met him at the station the other night. He is down for his health—been over-

working, I suppose. God knows what he works at; even Dobbs admits that he has very little to show for his promise. In case he's a trifle dull, I have asked the Cargills to come as well."

"Edward is so dull himself," said Cynthia.

"I don't know so much about that," said the Rector. "Edward is a man of sound common sense and good-wearing, everyday ability. I have always thought you were too severe in your judgment of Edward."

Mr. Heathcote, in spite of his touch for Chopin and fine eye for water-colours, was sufficiently of this world to see that it would not be altogether amiss if Cynthia could be brought to regard with some kindness the son of his neighbour Sir James Cargill. He knew that independence and force of will like hers were scarcely fitted to the married state; was well aware, moreover, that her force was wholly beyond the range of mathematical calculations—her impetuosity, a decided wilfulness, and a fatal obstinacy rendered her moods peculiarly various: if she married at all, her husband should not be too much given to mental analysis. Now Edward Cargill was the son of a rich baronet, was a man of quiet tastes and iron nerves. He held few opinions, and these were of the general-principles order; he thought the natural instincts extremely natural, and had no Theory of Life beyond that of taking the world as he found it. He could sympathize with A, who pulled down temples, and admire B, who raised them up again, but he never gave more than a smile—and perhaps a guinea subscription—to either. Thus he was an extremely forbearing, mild-tempered young fellow, who struck

the Rector as peculiarly adapted to a woman of Cynthia's disposition. It was a patent truth that Edward was only too anxious to prove his adaptability: Cynthia alone was inscrutable, gloomy, and reserved in the matter.

"I detest sound common sense," said that young lady, in reply to her father's remark, "particularly in Edward. Beef and common sense and Edward are to me synonymous terms. What a capital husband he would make Agatha!"

"My dear child, that is a little unkind," said the Rector, with a curious twitch of his upper lip. "Agatha is a dear, good girl—far too good for any ordinary man. If you really think that Edward is so utterly uninteresting, why should you be willing to couple his name with your sister's?"

Cynthia's eyes began to dance. "Because," she said, "he is so tremendously appreciative, and Agatha likes to be appreciated. If I married, I should want to do some of the appreciating myself; it would be just possible for Agatha to forego that luxury."

At that moment a footstep was heard outside, the door opened, and Agatha herself walked into the room. She was very tall and slim—decidedly elegant. Next to her elegance one would notice her placidity. Then in their order one would naturally admire her blue eyes, her pink and white skin, and her beautiful smooth braids of yellow hair. She started a little—ever so little, of course—as her eyes fell on Cynthia's hat, but her smile, which was sweet, patient, and habitual, never wavered.

"I am sorry to interrupt your work, papa," she began. The Rector looked confused, and dipped his

pen with immense energy into the ink-pot. "But Aunt Theodosia has asked me to tell you that she has heard from Lady Cargill, and they are all coming."

"What on earth shall I wear?" said Cynthia. "I wonder whether I can make something between now and seven."

"Your clothes are always in such sad need of repair," said Agatha. "If you remember, I begged you to get a new dinner-dress weeks ago. I think, though, we need not trouble papa with these small matters."

The Rector blamed himself for wishing that Agatha were a shade less respectful and considerate. He could scarcely admit to his own conscience—much less confide the melancholy truth to his eldest daughter—that he was more in the mood for discussing gowns than writing a sermon. But such indeed was the case. He dimly felt that there were disadvantages in living with a creature who had too keen a sense of duty and the fitness of things.

"I am glad for your sake, papa, that they can come," said Agatha, sweetly; "it will be such a complete change for you after your hard morning."

The Hon. and Rev. gentleman glanced nervously at the blank sheet before him and the "*It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing*."

"Yes," he said, "it will be pleasant, certainly."

Agatha moved to the door and held it open for a few seconds, hoping that Cynthia would accept the hint and leave the Rector in peace. But Cynthia never stirred.

"Are you coming, dear?" said Agatha, with the merest touch of reproach in her voice.

"I was just thinking," said Cynthia, dreamily, "how hideous I shall look in my old Pongee!" But she followed her sister out of the room.

Provence, meanwhile, by discreet questioning had learnt from his landlady that the flat house was the Rectory: that the Rector's daughters were considered beauties: that their names were respectively Miss Agatha and Miss Cynthia: that Miss Agatha was a good, Christian young lady: that Miss Cynthia was fascinating but not altogether what a clergyman's daughter ought to be. She was too gay-hearted, and never joined in the hymns at church. He longed to ask more, but was afraid lest he might seem over-interested, so he changed the subject with unnecessary haste to market-gardening, and listened patiently, if unhappily, to a long account of potato blight.

He found himself at the Rectory gate that evening with a large and entirely new kindliness in his heart for the whole human race, and a generous (and also new) tolerance for human failings in general. It seemed to him that so far as life was concerned the darkness was made light and the crooked straight. To feel this and yet not know why he felt it was delightful and sufficient. This mood, however, did not last—possibly because Cynthia was not in sight, probably because he was a man whose passion for analysis would make him pick a rainbow to pieces. The horrid suspicion seized him that he might be deceiving himself—that he was not after all so anxious to see his newly-found goddess—that he had not in reality been counting the hours since he had first seen her till the time drew near to meet her again. He decided to forget—if possible—his folly and cool his

disordered imagination by a rigid course of vegetable diet—that is to say when he returned to his lodgings on Monday! By this time he was not only inside the house but had his foot on the threshold of the drawing-room—he heard the hum of several voices—he was conscious of some half-dozen figures—he saw but one. She wore a gown of less artless design than her white muslin of the night before: her hair was more fashionably arranged, there was a franker suggestion of the world, the flesh, and the devil about her whole person: her eyes gleamed with mischief, with confidence in her own beauty and again more mischief. She had been anxiously watching the door for his arrival; she knew quite well that he was the stranger of the night before—strangers were rare in Little Speenham—yet now he was present she wondered why she had wished for the meeting. She was afraid he would look too pleased to see her! The thought crossed her mind that he must be weak—and she hated weakness. A man of strong will would have struggled longer against her fascination. The mischief in her eyes died away—she felt dissatisfied with human nature. But as she approached Provence she saw that his expression was cold, even stern; she found no trace of enthusiasm in his bearing. He eyed her beauty with calm; her toilette with indifference: his bow and smile were courteous—frigidly courteous—nothing more. At first she was relieved—then piqued—finally humiliated, but he rose mountains high in her respect. The reason for Provence's manner was briefly this: He had suddenly grown self-conscious; he had practised restraint too long to give way gracefully to the sway of impulse. To conceal his

embarrassment, therefore, he had assumed an unfelt stoicism—not so much to deceive Cynthia as himself.

"I am so glad you were able to come," said Lady Theodosia. "My brother has told me so much about you that I quite feel as though we had met before in some other state—the sort of delightful thing, you know, these wicked, charming Buddhists tell us about. Or am I confusing Buddhists with Platonists?—it would be so like me. What a thing it is to be an unlearned woman!" Lady Theodosia had many methods in conversation; the artless and ignorant style she found most useful for the subjection of Elderly Science. Provence was not elderly—she was not altogether certain that he was scientific, but she classed him among abnormals, and from her point of view it came to the same thing. "One point," she said to herself, "is a blessing. Neither of the girls could fancy a man who wore such shoes," so she left him with Cynthia and turned to Lady Cargill. The Baronet's wife was a very erect, well-covered woman about fifty or thereabouts, with a mild gaze and agreeable manners. She did not convey the irritating impression of having been a beauty in her youth, but looked as though she had been born with placid blonde hair, a *pince-nez*, and an elderly expression.

"I hope you are not delaying dinner for Edward, my dear Lady Theodosia," she said, "because that would distress him greatly. He only arrived from Speenham as we left, and of course we could not wait for him. He has been to see about the new cottages."

"Ah yes," chimed in Sir James, who stood with the Rector in front of the fireplace and concealed

Lady Theodosia's careful summer arrangement of ferns, Virginia cork, and red art-pots, "my boy is becoming an idealist. Now my experience of idealists is this—they think very high but act on the whole rather low, and make uncommonly bad landlords. I don't believe in these Oxford lads, all theory and no experience. This is an age of immature cause and premature result." Sir James had not the smallest idea of what he meant, but he thought it sounded so tersely put and so much like a leading article that he repeated it again. "Yes—immature cause and premature result. We eat the blossom in preference to the fruit, and no wonder we feel empty." (He rather prided himself on his graceful gift for metaphor.) "Our universities have become mere forcing grounds to supply an unnatural appetite for the insipid and costly. Let my boy stick to his boat-club and Roman law—that's all he's good for—and leave model cottages alone. What on earth is the use of bath-rooms and patent drains to the agricultural labourer—what does *he* know about microbes?" It must not be supposed that Sir James's impassioned rhetoric was due to the inspiration of the moment: all his sentiments were darkly pondered and duly packed down into top-heavy sentences in a Commonplace Book before he delivered them to the world. This evening, however, his discourse was interrupted by the entrance of his son—the ostensible object of his remarks. Young Cargill was undeniably well-favoured, and bore himself like a gentleman—although he lacked the air of distinction which characterized Godfrey Provence. After Lady Theodosia and the Rector had greeted him he seated himself by Cynthia, who blushed with annoyance at

the undisguised admiration in his eyes. Provence, however, saw the blush and already saw himself miserably presenting congratulations at their wedding. In despair he left them together and turned to Agatha, who certainly looked extremely well in black lace and yellow roses.

"I feel I ought to ask you," she said, "whether you found your journey down very tiresome. Our train-service is so bad, and I always think that unnecessary waste of time almost amounts to physical suffering if one has an active mind. I hope you provided yourself with books." She had gathered from Cynthia's random remarks made in the intervals of dressing for dinner that Mr. Provence was a writer and probably learned. She thought that her little speech would fall agreeably on his ears—that it would be a delicate way of showing that his fame and cultured tastes were not unknown to her.

"I amused myself by looking out of the window," he replied, innocently, "although I did just glance at a very diverting tale about a French poodle and a bishop in *The Piccadilly News*. Have you seen it?"

Agatha was too lady-like to stare, too calm to gasp, but she felt grateful to the parlour-maid for announcing dinner.

At the dinner-table, which was round for the occasion, Provence, who had taken in Lady Theodosia, found himself next to Cynthia and Edward Cargill. The more he tried to convince himself that she and Edward were desperately and mutually in love, the more beautiful and desirable she appeared. "And what can she see in him?" he thought, and took a savage pleasure in picturing Edward some twenty

years hence, fat, red-faced and hearty—the replica of his worthy father who sat opposite—the typical country-gentleman of ancient lineage, good cellar, and moderate views.

"I once read a Greek play, you know, with a crib," Lady Theodosia was explaining, "skipping the particles, of course, and those awfully fascinating choruses. I found them too engrossing—and it does not do for a woman to get too absorbed in one particular thing. Her social duties demand that her interests should be scattered."

Conversation wended its blithesome way through Lord Todhunter's new conservatories, paused at the disgraceful state of the high-road, brightened considerably at Farmer Drew's prize oxen, but came to a stand-still at the Future of England. Perhaps this was due to Sir James, who took a just pride in his power of concentration, and had no mind for the Future of anything, with stewed sweet-breads on his plate. The Present, with a near background of *champignons à la crême*, was all sufficient. So he relapsed into silence and the unspeakable joy of mastication. Cynthia peeped at Provence from under her lashes. She caught his eye and found it sympathetic. In a moment the whole aspect of things was changed for both of them. Provence found a mysterious joy in being bored since she was bored too. Cynthia—more moderate in her emotions—felt that the evening might not prove so dull as she had first feared it would be. To their common satisfaction, general conversation girded up its loins once more and attacked the local County Council.

"I was listening to the nightingales when you

passed last night," she said, when the Rector, and Sir James, and Lady Theodosia were fairly started on their campaign ; "they have been silent for weeks."

"I thought that this part of the world was noted for its nightingales," said Provence, wondering if it was profane to admire a goddess's throat.

"I believe there is some such boast," she said; "but have you never noticed that places, like people, find their reputation—particularly if it is good—sufficiently useful without the fatigue of living up to it ?" Provence did not see the highest type of feminine excellence in the Miltonian Eve, but he thought a woman should believe easily. In Cynthia's case he began to fear that this bewitching characteristic was entirely absent.

"I see you are a cynic," he said.

"Oh no," she said, quickly, "I haven't got a label. I'm afraid I'm too much guided by what somebody—I forget who—calls a 'feeling in the bones,' to make a pretence to the feeblest kind of philosophy." Then she sighed. "Don't you think," she said, with an expression of touching simplicity, "it would be much easier to be good if we left everything to our instincts ? Reason—what learned people call reason—seems so much more artificial."

Provence felt an admiration for that feminine daring which will rush in where a bishop might fear to tread, but his mental habits did not allow him to answer her in a hurry. He had his own ideas on the subject, no doubt, but would have required several sheets of foolscap on which to express them—inadequately and with the meaning between the lines.

"You are plunging into deep water," he said, "and

that is dangerous." This he was well aware was just what any one else might have said. The thought was irritating, since, for some reason, he was extremely anxious to appear rather different from the ordinary diner-out—to her. He did not think himself different, nor did he have the mean ambition to seem what he was not ; he only knew that if he could find favour in her sight even in a small degree—and he had heard that women in their delicious generosity could, under given conditions, discover what was best in a man when the majority of his fellows saw little but the indifferent—it would be something to find courage in.

"Do you know," said Cynthia, suddenly, "I made sure I should see you again—when you asked me the way to East Sheerwell yesterday ?"

This was probably the most unstudied remark she had made that evening—for she found few things more difficult than giving herself to the world, as it were, unvarnished. The strongest element in her character was that which, for want of a better name, we may call the histrionic instinct. Life to her was a series of situations in which she invariably figured as the heroine—a heroine who was always charming and graceful, with feeling enough to be interesting but not enough to be tiresome. If she wept she was careful to dry her eyes before they grew red—if she laughed it was to show her exquisite teeth, for her sense of humour was more grim than merry ; if she talked nonsense, but looked the key to all philosophies, especially those of earth, as she did that evening, she felt she was playing Juliet—a Juliet who had travelled and was the niece of Lady Theodosia, for the be-

wilderment of a Romeo who, though no longer a youth and certainly not possessed of the romantic air, had at all events a well-built figure, considerable fire in his eyes, and was the "makings of a success." Juliet was a *rôle* she could rarely indulge in, nor indeed was it a *rôle* she particularly cared for. It was so hard to find a Romeo worth playing to! With a woman's quickness she saw that Provence was a man of unusual refinement and delicate feeling—he would never take too much for granted. She promised herself some excitement in finding the limit to his self-restraint.

Edward Cargill, meantime, began to feel hardly used. He, after all, had led Cynthia in to dinner, and she had not addressed him directly once, except to ask his opinion of that year's growth of asparagus. Agatha had, no doubt, done her best to atone for her sister's want of manners, and had expressed her views with much propriety and no little erudition on the recent excavations in Asia Minor, to which Edward had replied that excavating and exploring were awfully jolly for those who liked them, but he didn't like them. Here Sir James came puffing to the rescue by inquiring—certainly with some want of relevance—whether any more boys in the church choir were down with the influenza. Nor did he stop there—for the choir reminded him of music, and music reminded him of an article he had read that morning on the increased importation of cat-gut. Cat-gut very naturally suggested cats, and cats brought the Egyptians—whom he had quite forgotten—to his mind. And Lady Theodosia had carefully mentioned in her note that the new man was an Egyptologist. Egypt

was plainly *the* topic of all others for general discussion. He commenced with a loud cough : " Now as to the Egyptians ! " he began. The company looked bewildered but attentive. " Now as to the Egyptians. They are an interesting race, if you like." Here he looked at Provence and smiled encouragingly. "I can fully understand a man devoting his life and energy to a close study of their immense Past. I don't pretend to know much about it myself," he added, with magnificent modesty, " it is naturally matter for the specialist ; but in a quiet way and in one's library of a morning, I say one would be—well —one would be an ass not to feel a certain amount of awe at the antiquity of the Pyramids." Then he stared so very hard at Provence that he felt constrained to make some remark.

" I fear," he said, " that indifference as to the Past of Egypt is far more common than you suppose. You, no doubt, have studied the subject seriously."

" Merely as a *dilettante*," said Sir James, lightly, " the merest *dilettante*." As he had spent some twenty-five minutes that morning skipping through " Egypt " in the Encyclopædia, he felt that in describing himself as a *dilettante* he had, if anything, underrated his knowledge. To what lengths the ingenuous gentleman would have carried his discourse it is impossible to say ; but as Mr. Heathcote's conscience did not allow him to indulge in sleeve-laughter at a guest's expense—particularly when that guest was an estimable, kind-hearted man who owned the finest peach-houses in the county and was a liberal subscriber to the parish charities—he determined to set matters right.

"Sir James is taking it for granted that you have inherited your father's tastes," he said, and looked at Provence with a meaning smile.

"Then I must own at once that I have not," said Provence. "I may not even call myself, with Sir James, a *dilettante* in the study of Egyptology. I have read everything my father wrote, but my interest has been mainly personal—that is to say, I thought more of the writer than the thing written about."

Cynthia was here just a little reminded of her own attitude towards her father's sermons.

"Then," said Sir James, surprise mingling with relief on his radiant countenance, "you are not an Egyptologist, after all!" Provence could not imagine why Lady Theodosia looked so much happier and begged him to take more cream with his strawberries. It was the first time she had really smiled on him since his arrival.

When the women returned to the drawing-room, Agatha expressed a fear that their new acquaintance was a trifle superficial, and certainly a little harsh—she would not say disrespectful—when he referred to his father's noble contributions to learning.

"I don't agree with you," said Cynthia, who was still thinking of the sermons.

"I may be mistaken, dear," murmured Agatha; "it is best not to be over-positive, one way or the other, in judging others. He is not at all bad-looking —for a clever man. I dare say some people would call him handsome, in a peculiar way."

"I should never dream of calling him even passable," said Cynthia, who was perhaps in a teasing mood. "There is a certain refinement about his face, and his

eyes are intelligent and rather a nice colour. His mouth has a great deal of character, although it has a suggestion of weakness. His nose and chin suit the rest of him well enough, and there may be a sort of—well, classic grace about his head."

"I didn't notice all that," said Agatha, softly.

"I was sitting next to him, you must remember," said Cynthia, with a cold voice and hot cheeks.

"Well," said Lady Theodosia, "at any rate he seems a pleasant, gentlemanly man, and, I should say, very easy to amuse. It is an immense comfort to find that he is an ordinary mortal with the usual tastes. I wonder if he likes marrow-bones—we might have them for luncheon to-morrow."

"Since he is such an inoffensive person," chimed in Lady Cargill, "I wish dear Edward would take to him. I sometimes fear that he finds home a little dull after Oxford. Oxford must be so cheerful." Lady Cargill had married young, and had spent her life—with the exception of a few brief days at the Great Exhibition, a tour round the Lakes, and a trip to Switzerland—at Northwold Hall, her husband's country seat. An imaginary heart-affection was her excuse for avoiding the gaieties of London and a town house; and as her accomplishments, besides playing "The Minstrel Boy" (with variations) on the piano, lay in the direction of her household and the care of other women's babies, it was perhaps just as well that she confined her calls and advice within a six-mile radius. "For some reasons," she continued, after a pause, "I should not be sorry to see my dear boy engaged to a suitable person." She glanced at Agatha as she spoke, for although she was timidly attached to

Cynthia, she was only seized with nervous palpitation when, in nightmares, she beheld her as the possible mistress of Northwold Hall and the model dairy. Besides, putting aside all other considerations, she had a firm conviction that true refinement and good breeding found their only outward and visible expression in sloping shoulders, a straight, thin nose, and an extremely high forehead. Agatha possessed all these qualifications—Cynthia none of them. But Agatha was turning over the leaves of the *Classical Review* when Lady Cargill spoke, and if she saw the look she did not appear to understand its significance. When, however, Edward came into the room a few minutes later, she smiled at him so prettily that even his mother thought him an oaf for not betraying a little rapture. As it was, he seemed decidedly gloomy, and after threading his way rather aimlessly among the numerous bandy-legged chairs and squat tables which Lady Theodosia had purchased by post through the inspiriting catalogue of an *Art Furnisher*, he settled himself near Cynthia.

"We were just saying, my boy," said Lady Cargill, with the unconscious guile of a perfectly truthful woman, "how agreeably surprised we are in this Mr. Provence." Edward did not look so overjoyed as he might have done at this piece of intelligence.

"Aunt Theodosia is so rejoiced to find that he is not learned," said Agatha, "and really I cannot imagine how we all managed to get such a mistaken idea of his knowledge. The moment I spoke to him I felt the incongruity between his reputation and—well, his way of expressing himself generally."

Edward could be jealous and could lose his temper,

but he was not mean-spirited. "Oh, well," he said, "I dare say he knows a lot, only where should we be if he jawed on big things?" Cynthia liked him so much for this that she looked him straight in the face and smiled—an action which made so much difference to Edward, that he felt almost compensated for her behaviour at dinner.

"I think we might have some music, Cynthia," said the Rector, who entered at that moment, followed by Sir James and Provence, the former of whom had detained them in the conservatory to dilate on the merits of his new head-gardener and some freshly imported guano.

Cynthia went to the piano, and played with much passion and bewildering inaccuracy the noisiest of the *Rhapsodies Hongroises.* Her enthusiasm and easy familiarity with the loud pedal were almost professional. Until she had finished her remarkable performance Provence held his breath and all but wished himself away. Then he forgot everything—even her want of culture (as *he* understood it, that is to say, for culture of a sort was a stalled ox at the Rectory) and the wrong notes—in contemplating the beautiful flush which followed her exertions. In common with many who are wise by profession and not a few who are similarly gifted by nature, Provence's wisdom was of far greater service to his friends—when they would avail themselves of it—than to himself. His discernment in reading character, which belonged rather to an almost feminine instinct than to academic logic, and was part of his literary faculty, was completely overbalanced in the case of Cynthia by the strong personal magnetism she had

possessed for him from the first. To have discovered the force of physical attraction was a fact in itself so engrossing that all other considerations were, if not forgotten, at least permitted to slumber. Even as she played he was vaguely conscious that she revealed much of her own nature in that strange blending of force and uncertainty with which she rendered music. To have felt this, no matter how dimly, was a step towards imperfect vision. He could never be completely blind. He had no further opportunity to speak with Cynthia that evening, for Edward never left her side. So, obeying his artistic instinct to study, at all hazards, something, he turned to Agatha. He felt bound to admit that this young lady was extremely pretty and plumbable. That is to say, he found no difficulty in reading her amiable character and learning her humbly expressed, feminine, and correct opinions. He did not always agree with her, it is true, but as she never by any possible chance thought anything which was not endorsed by at least two clearly recognized authorities, the cause rested with his idiosyncrasies and not her ignorance. Their differences, therefore, could never be otherwise than polite: he was not at all sure from his brief experience of Cynthia that he could promise so much where she was concerned. To begin with, she, too, had idiosyncrasies, and it is assuredly more difficult to maintain one's equanimity in argument with a young woman whose chief aim in discussion is to prove that somebody, though not herself, must be a fool, than with an intelligent, well-read lady who squeaks musically with touching self-effacement under the colossal mask of Carlyle or Browning.

"That Provence is a very decent fellow," said the Rector, when the Cargills had departed, Provence had been shown to his room, and Lady Theodosia had retired to her bed; "he is a great improvement on his father." Agatha opened her china-blue eyes and wondered whether she ought not to mention the French poodle and the bishop.

"I don't think I like him," said Cynthia; "he has a way of speaking meekly and looking aggressive. I wonder if he is conceited."

"My dear," said the Rector, "I never saw a man—a man, that is to say, of his ability—who was less of the egoist."

"At all events," said Cynthia, "you must own he is hard to get at. I believe he has a pasha-like contempt for women."

"That never struck me," said Agatha. "I should say he was much too apathetic to have a contempt for anything."

"Apathetic! I should never call you a good judge of faces, Agatha. He probably feels too much—not too little. There is a feminine sensitiveness about his mouth."

"I understood you to say his mouth was weak, when we were talking after dinner." Cynthia was certainly provoking.

"Is not feminine sensitiveness something like weakness in a man?" said Cynthia. "I don't see that I have contradicted myself."

It was not until she found herself in the solitude of her own bedroom that the uncomfortable consciousness seized her of not having been pleasant. She was a long time undressing, and tried to make peace with

her conscience by dwelling on Agatha's tiresome habit of magnifying details. "For instance," she said to herself, "if Agatha were the Creator she would make her beetles all legs and no body. One would think there was nothing of Mr. Provence but a mouth." But even then she was not happy, and when her head was fairly aching with sophistry (emphasized by the hair-brush) she marched into Agatha's room, which adjoined her own. The gentle Agatha was already in bed and asleep.

"Agatha," said Cynthia, tapping her shoulder enthusiastically with the bristle-side of her weapon. "Agatha, are you awake?"

Agatha started with pain, and opening her eyes, stared at her sister with something curiously resembling wrath. "I *was* not awake," she said.

"I only wanted to tell you," said Cynthia, "that I have been a Beast this evening. I am sorry," and then she returned—with the proud sorrow of a fallen angel in her expression—to her own apartment.

IV.

When Cynthia made her appearance at breakfast the next morning, Provence thought she looked the picture of heavenly meekness—but for the spark of inextinguishable fire in her eyes. She wore, too, a white cotton gown of severe simplicity—a simplicity, however, which did full justice to her figure. It was not till long afterwards that he remembered how, from the first day he had seen her, her clothes always seemed part of her nature; how her gowns, her hats, her very slippers and tortoiseshell hairpins, betrayed her mood no less than her eyes—certainly more than her beautiful, misleading mouth. She greeted Provence with an old-fashioned dignity which made him feel almost as though he were meeting her for the first time. He thought of her manner in the garden on that delicious evening when she looked unutterable things at the sky and assembled nature: he would not decide on which occasion she was most interesting.

Cynthia, meanwhile, who appeared to be deeply absorbed in her father's discourse on the tendency of modern poetry, was in reality criticising Provence as she had never criticised him before and would never criticise him again. It was a peculiar process, and she would have called it "making up her mind" about him. It happened he was looking his best; and, ignominious as the thought may be, who can deny that the whole tenor of a life may often depend on

the mere turning in or out of one's toes at a critical moment? Provence sat with his face half in shadow —there was something which reminded her of a portrait by Velasquez in the pose of his head and the light on his features. What she chose to call the artistic craving in her nature was satisfied. She could call him picturesque. Picturesque, and with a Future! She drew a sigh of relief, and under pretence of steadying a rose which was half-falling from its vase on a table close by him (for with her, even impulse was well-tempered with a sense of the effective) sat down by his side. He tried to remember afterwards what they had talked of, but he could only recall the sound of her voice, the glance of her eyes, the pleasure he had felt when, in one of her quick, expressive movements, she had touched his arm to call attention to a vine which grew outside the window.

Having once decided that Provence reminded her of a Velasquez, Cynthia plunged into open flirtation. On one pretence and another she encouraged him to spend a good portion of his time at the Rectory every day; after a week or so pretence was dropped altogether, and her family were given to understand that he came solely for the sake of seeing her. This stage or affairs was hailed with undisguised thankfulness by the Rector, whose feeling for harmony had been rudely jarred by the necessity for his acting the blind dragon. He had long lost interest in Cynthia's little *comédies à deux*—they always ended the same way. "Provence is at least thirty, or he looks it," he said, in a confidential chat with Lady Theodosia; "and if he chooses to make a fool of himself over a mere child like Cynthia—a girl of twenty—I really think it would be

positively indelicate on my part to interfere. As for Cynthia, I should consider it a grave error of judgment to notice anything one way or the other. These innocent little affairs all tend to mould a girl's character; they give her self-confidence: the more experience she has of men, the more likely she will be to choose a good husband." Lady Theodosia said nothing. She was waiting for the point of the Rector's observations. "After all, you know," he said, "if anything *should* happen, Dobbs thinks a lot of him, and Dobbs has any amount of influence. A successful author makes a handsome income nowadays." Lady Theodosia, who could never, even in imagination, condescend to the unpractical, went through a swift mental calculation as to the amount of income necessary for the maintenance of a house in Fitz-John's Avenue—allowing for a bi-monthly dinner party, an evening once a week, a fortnightly afternoon, five servants and a brougham.

"It could be done for six thousand a year," she said, aloud, "and it would mean management, even then. Besides, his brain might give out. Just think what a bore that would be!"

"We won't think anything so uncharitable," said the Rector, kindly. He only liked to contemplate the cheerful—having boundless faith in the law of self-preservation in the human character.

"Cynthia," said Lady Theodosia, one day, when Provence had left them after an unusually long visit, "what do you see in this man?" Now between this lady and her niece there existed a feeling which, though not affection (for there are no Davids and Jonathans among women), might very well be com-

pared to the *bonhomie* of two fellow-artists—two artists who are respectively convinced that their styles are too distinct to clash in disagreeable rivalry. So far as it lay in Cynthia's disposition to be confidential, she was confidential with her aunt; so far as Lady Theodosia spoke her mind, she spoke it to her niece; so far as moral influence went, neither had the presumption to attempt anything of the kind where the other was concerned. Thus they always kept their tempers—a remarkable circumstance in the friendship of two women.

"What do you see in this man?" repeated Lady Theodosia. To do her justice, she had not the smallest concern for her niece: she was thinking of Provence, for whom—in spite of his shoes—she had conceived a liking which only required a large balance at his banker's to develop into auntly affection. "But he is not the man for Cynthia," she thought; "he has not enough of the brute about him. A John Knox might be able to manage her; and then a good deal would depend on his tailor." Here she was mistaken. Cynthia could excuse considerable eccentricity in the dress of a person of note.

She blushed a little when her aunt asked her what she saw in Provence. She felt it almost a slur on her taste. Few women care to feel the necessity of justifying their preferences—least of all a woman in whom the desire to be thought more than humanly infallible was the master passion.

"Don't *you* care about him?" she said at last. Her tone was almost apologetic.

"I think he is quite charming," said Lady Theodosia, "an interesting person in every way. But

I may as well say at once that I don't think you ought to flirt with him—he takes it much too seriously. Things cannot remain as they are for ever; there must be a climax. For the present he has put you on a pedestal and worships you afar off, but sooner or later he will remember that you are flesh. Man, after all, is not a spirit."

Cynthia laughed or—to be truthful at the expense of euphony—chuckled. "How you exaggerate!" she said. "Mr. Provence has come here for his health, and naturally wishes to be amused. Besides, when a man has been ordered complete rest, he likes to imagine himself in love with some woman. It is marmalade for the pill. If I had not appeared he would have discovered unique attractions in his landlady."

"Why did he not choose Agatha?" said Lady Theodosia.

Cynthia gave her answer unconsciously by looking into the mirror which faced them. "My dear aunt," she said, "Agatha is dutiful, and thinks of others and reads Hooker—she will no doubt get a kind husband. But he will never be her lover. Men do not love these still women—they have a high opinion of them."

"I have no more to say," said Lady Theodosia, "except this—these literary and artistic people are very dangerous. You never find two alike, and the only certain thing about them is that ultimately they will do something to make everybody uncomfortable."

But she was not pleased with her niece that day. She herself was no doubt very worldly, very cynical and very heartless, but she had not always been so;

and although her more generous instincts often perished, like weak chickens from sheer inability to break through their shell, they did occasionally struggle into evidence. She liked Provence, and where she liked she could—at a pinch—be loyal. "Cynthia shall not make a fool of him, if I can help it," she said to herself, with a vicious snap of her teeth. "She is altogether too self-confident. She would be much improved by an occasional failure. She is too used to success." If the jealousy, the natural jealousy of a woman who had outlived her own days of desperate flirtation, added a zest to her purpose, the purpose itself was none the less a kind one so far as her intentions went and Provence was concerned. As a rule, there can be no better adviser for a man than a woman who has a passionless affection for him: she can under these circumstances almost succeed in being impartial; she can even see where he may be in fault; she can bring herself to face his shortcomings—nay, more, she can deal with them. If Lady Theodosia had been asked just why she liked Provence, she would not have been able to say. She could not possibly tell people that he reminded her of her first lover—about the legs.

The morning after her conversation with Cynthia she walked to the cottage where he lodged, for the ostensible reason of inquiring after his landlady's baby, who was cutting teeth. It was a significant fact that she put on her most becoming bonnet and mantle. That a ministering angel should of necessity be dowdy was no part of her creed. When she had finished with the landlady she strolled into the garden, where she saw Provence reading. He was surprised, but

rather pleased than otherwise, to see her: first, because she was Cynthia's aunt; secondly, because she was an attractive-looking woman.

"I have come to have a chat with you," she began —with a directness she was capable of when it appeared expedient; "you won't think me a bore?" She smiled at him with her large brown eyes. "Let us walk down this path," she continued, "we can talk better." With one hand she caught up her silk skirt: she laid the other—covered in light grey kid—very lightly on his arm. The movement was perfectly spontaneous, and probably the nearest approach to a motherly caress she could think of. She had never felt so nearly sorry for any one in her life as she did for him. "He reminds me more than ever of Talbot!" she sighed to herself.

"I am coming straight to the point," she said, "because I know you like candour. I want to tell you—you will forgive me, I know—I want to tell you that you are growing too fond of my niece. Pray don't look so distressed. I am sorry to have to say it —it is so difficult to put these things—you know what I mean. I don't think you ever tried to disguise your admiration for her—there has been no necessity for anything of the kind. If I have misunderstood you, however, you will tell me so."

Provence, who had at first turned red, was now very pale.

"You are quite right," he said, proudly. "I have not tried to disguise my feelings—it may be I could not. But I have not been foolish enough to hope that —that Miss Heathcote had the smallest interest in me —if that is what you mean."

"You are not being sincere with yourself," said Lady Theodosia. "Cynthia has given you every encouragement—you must feel it—whether you admit it is another matter. You are too modest—a sure sign you are very much in love. It is just because Cynthia has led you to believe in every possible way that she cares for your society quite as much as you care for hers, that I am here to-day. Don't contradict me and say she hasn't: I am a woman of the world and know what I am talking about. Now when Cynthia takes it into her head to flirt, she is absolutely without principle; she forgets everything —except herself. Let me entreat you to leave this place—you are only making misery for yourself by staying. She will never love you: it isn't in her to love any one. I am fond of her; I know her fascination—she fascinates *me*: but she is made of granite. You may like her, you may admire her to your heart's content, but you must not love her."

"Lady Theodosia," he said, "I know you mean to be kind; I know you believe every word you say: but as you have been straightforward with me I will be perfectly plain with you. I cannot think as you do with regard to—Miss Heathcote. She would not be granite to the right man. That I do not happen to be that man is not at all extraordinary. You know," he added, "every man cannot be Mark Anthony, that a Cleopatra should love him—it is enough for an ordinary mortal that he may have the inestimable privilege of breaking his heart for a Cleopatra."

"You are a fool," said Lady Theodosia, "and of course I like you better for it. I did not expect you

to believe me as a matter of fact, but I have done what I honestly thought was my duty. I have warned you, and I can do no more. As for this nonsense about the right man, don't make excuses for her on that ground. The right man for her is he who has the most money and the biggest position. She was born for noise, not love. We won't return to this subject again. As I said just now, I have done what I could, and the rest lies with yourself. Naturally you will hate me after this, but I knew what I was bringing upon myself when I started. I will say this," she added, after a pause: "if Cynthia should prove different to what I have said (but she won't), I should be glad for her sake, because I like you, and I think—this is the truth—you are far too good for her. Good-bye." Then she pressed his hand and hurried away.

Cynthia sat at home in the meantime, pondering her aunt's sayings in her heart. Until Lady Theodosia had spoken, she had lived her amusement with Provence from day to day, taking small thought for the morrow, and having still less for the yesterday. Now she felt she ought to prepare in some way for a climax. It was a revelation to her to find that preparation was necessary. She usually left climaxes to the hour, her mood and fate. But she liked Provence; she could not persuade herself that all the climax would be on his side. This was awkward. Apart, however, from any mere personal attraction he may have had for her, he had once told her—after a great deal of ingenious cross-questioning on her part—that the great Dobbs—Dobbs mighty in literature, in Fleet Street, and the New Criticism—had offered

him the editorship of "The Present Age," a monthly organ devoted to the propaganda of piquant (but not necessarily original) theories of life. It made a feature of unsigned articles, which were commonly supposed to be written by the Great (and perhaps Improper) of the earth.

A woman need not be in the market-place to show her talent for marketing. Cynthia saw at once that the editor of a periodical so justly reverenced as "The Present Age" would enjoy a reputation, and something in the way of income not totally unworthy of a Veiled Prophet. Now if there was one thing she respected far above titles and riches, it was success; if she had one cherished ambition, it was to be the wife of a successful man, a man who painted much talked-of pictures, or wrote conspicuous books, or preached to big congregations, or, in fact, was able in any way, either by his ability or impudence, to push himself into a prominent position. She naturally preferred a genius to a quack, she liked what is considered the best of everything; but geniuses were rare, and although one could never mistake a genius for a quack, it was quite possible to mistake a quack for a genius. Provence, she feared, was a great deal too much in earnest to care for applause just for its own sake, but she saw no reason why, under the influence of an ambitious woman, he should not make a considerable buzz about his name with comparatively little trouble. Left to himself, he would probably spend his life trying to realize some crazy ideal, and in the end accomplish nothing. That was always the way with a sort of genius, a man whose mind was pitched higher than his voice. "I could make some-

thing of him," she said to herself, "if I could get certain notions out of his head." For he, in his vain-glory, had spoken lightly of "The Present Age;" had laughed at the idea of being its editor; had announced his intention of sticking to his novel—an incomprehensible manuscript which Cynthia could not understand, and which he did not seem able to explain.

That evening she went into the garden as usual, and as usual found Provence in the arbour. He always came after dinner, at the Rector's kind invitation, to run through a little music. He looked very pale and very determined. Cynthia was more than ever convinced that he was quite the most interesting of all her lovers—and she had had a number.

"You look like Prometheus defying the Furies—you remember in Shelley!" she said, as she came up to him. "Are you angry—with me?"

"I have come to say good-bye—to you all," he said abruptly; "I am going to London to-night."

"To-night?" said Cynthia, "to-night? Have you heard any bad news? How rude I am—but it is so sudden." She seemed, and was in reality, dismayed and disappointed. Was this the climax? This, the supreme situation of the third act? Would there be no one but that dull Edward Cargill for the remainder of the summer? No wonder her heart sank.

"It is necessary for me to go," said Provence; "I have stayed too long already." Some faint inkling of his meaning dawned upon her, and her spirits brightened.

"It must be very dull for you," she said, with a melancholy little sigh, "very, very dull." This was more than he could bear.

"Oh, Cynthia," he said, "you know it has not been dull."

"Then why are you going?" she said.

"Because I dare not stay."

She hesitated, looked down, and blushed. She was about to take a bold step. She really did not want him to go. She moved nearer to him, so near that a lock of her hair, loosened by the wind, blew across his face.

"What shall I do when you have gone?" she said.

He could scarcely trust himself to speak. "You would not care?"

"How could I help—caring?"

"It was so nice of him," she said to herself when she was going to sleep that night, "not to try and kiss me. Men don't understand, as a rule, that a woman likes to get used to them by degrees. It is rather amusing to be engaged, for a change. He makes love very prettily, and yet is always a man."

It was Cynthia's wish that the engagement should be kept secret. "It is so uncomfortable to have the outside world in one's confidence," she said. He urged in vain that her father at least was not the outside world. "The only thing that can possibly concern papa," she answered, "are your prospects. When you have settled everything with Dobbs, it will be time to speak to him." She did not add that unless everything was settled with Dobbs, and in her way, the necessity for interviewing her father on the subject of a formal betrothal would never arise—such candour was far removed from *her* method of gaining a point. At first he told her decidedly that nothing on earth would

induce him to take up journalism, and the editor's work for "The Present Age" would mean journalism in its most aggravated form. He cared nothing for income and hated notoriety. Cynthia liked him for appearing a little obstinate: it would add lustre to her triumph. For she scented triumph in the distance; patience, a few more smiles, once or twice the suspicion of a tear, sometimes the mere worldly wisdom of "What shall we live on?", the pressure of her cheek against his shoulder—"To please *me*, Godfrey." There was never a Samson so strong but he met his Delilah: it is only by the mercy of God that Delilah has occasionally a conscience. Provence surrendered one evening. The next morning, however, he told her he had thought better of it: he renounced Dobbs and all his works for ever.

"Very well," said Cynthia, quietly. "When I have made a mistake I am generally strong enough to own it. I have made a mistake in you. It does not console me to remember that women are usually mistaken—in men."

"Have I ever tried to give you a false impression of me?"

"I don't know. But I will own, if you like, that it did not require much trying. I was only too willing to be deceived. That is a humiliating confession—not that I ought to mind humiliation—now."

"Cynthia! What are you saying?"

"You have disappointed me. That I feel the disappointment so much is perhaps amusing—for you. It is only an additional bitterness to me."

"Is this because I have broken a foolish promise

I made to you last night—and before I have suggested any compromise ? "

" I despise a man who breaks his word and makes explanations afterwards."

" I thought you were just."

" Do not talk to me of justice ! Have I not loved you ? was I not, am I not still, ambitious for you ? And you have failed me. If I did not know that you had ability I would say nothing—I would not have cared for you in the first place. It is because I see you so indolent, so satisfied to grovel among the nobodies whose only *métier* is to grovel, that I am heartsick. I admit I like to see brains in a man or a woman : it may be weakness on my part."

" Will you not give me time to prove what I can do ? "

" You have been all your life proving, and this offer from Dobbs seems to be the proof. It is the only thing I pin my faith to."

" That is to say," said Provence, " you believe in me because Dobbs does."

" You may attribute any meanness to me you please."

" Do you wish me to close with him ? "

" My wishes can have no interest for you—now."

" You know your wishes are everything to me."

" You think more of your unfinished novel ! And —you would not do it if I did wish it."

" But do you ? "

" Am I not crying my eyes out—because you won't."

" Then you do wish it, after all I have said ? "

" This is childish. Well—yes—I suppose I do."

"You are sure? You do not care how ashamed I may be afterwards?"

"That is an absurd way of putting it. I do not consider you a competent judge of your own work."

"That may or may not be. But would you care for me—even a little—if I did this to please you?"

"I could not care for you—a little."

"Cynthia! Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I mean it. Women are weak, and after all I am only a woman. Why do you try me so and make me say things—in anger? Do you think I enjoy saying them?"

"But—dearest—I cannot say yes to Dobbs."

"Are you trying an experiment with me to see how long my patience will last! When it fails I think you will be sorry—at least, if you love me as you pretend to do."

"You are using hard words."

"Not too hard. Is it a noble amusement, to torment a woman who loves you?"

"I would die for you—but I cannot say yes to Dobbs."

"I thought only women were obstinate."

"It is not a question of obstinacy, but of right."

"That implies I am urging you to do wrong."

"No—but you do not understand."

"Then I am a fool? I prefer, on the whole, to be a knave. I must decline to squabble like this. It is not only wearying, but vulgar. So far as I am concerned the subject shall drop for ever. Say no to Dobbs, by all means."

"Cynthia, you will see that I am right—some day."

"Possibly. When I do see it I will own I was

wrong—I can promise no more; but till then—till then—I will never willingly set eyes upon you again."

"Is this the end, Cynthia?"

"The end? Yes. I wish there had never been a beginning. I am sick of you, but most of all sick of myself."

"I will go, then."

"It is certainly best that you should."

It seemed as though the sound of her own voice had barely died away when he was out of sight. She waited a few moments, not so much in the hope that he would return, but because she felt that to stand there alone—determined if sorrowful—was not only the most artistic, but the most picturesque thing to do.

He returned, however. It was not so easy to leave her—with some of her tears on his sleeve. "It shall be as you say," he said. He felt as though he had signed away his soul.

Cynthia laughed with the gaiety of a child. "You goose!" she said, "you goose! Why couldn't you have given in sooner?"

* * * * *

Cynthia felt she had done well: the prospect of marrying a successful writer became daily more pleasing to her. As to the novelty of "being engaged," she had classed it in her list of tried-and-found-wanting experiments before the end of the first fortnight. She found her lover's interest in all that concerned her a decided nuisance: he asked her questions which were often difficult to answer: he was too anxious to take upon his own shoulders the

burden of her future. She had proposed to manage him—it was far from her intention that he should ever dream of managing her. He recommended her, kindly, but with an air of authority, the authors he would like her to read—among others Thomas à Kempis; he gave her volumes of Scarlatti—old editions with a figured bass and not so much as a pedal mark; he borrowed her *Rhapsodies Hongroises*, and always forgot to return them: he told her that Nature was better than Botticelli (which, to be honest, she thought herself—but the Rectory culture did not allow her to say so); in fact, he showed that he did not consider her taste—on all points—as perfect as it might be. When the day arrived for his departure for town, she felt positively relieved. "He is charming, of course," she confided to Lady Theodosia, whom she had told of the engagement unknown to Provence, for, in spite of her determination to keep the matter secret, she had felt the need of a pair of ears for her bursts of dissatisfaction. She had reached that ripeness of experience when silent suffering seems misdirected energy. "Yes, he is charming," she repeated, "only—I hardly know how to express it—when I have been with him a whole afternoon I feel as though I had been for a picnic with the Twelve Apostles and Peter left early! I always thought that Peter was the most interesting."

The parting was a very different matter to Provence. He kissed her once—he was always afraid of wearying her with his kisses—and fairly fled out of her presence, not daring to linger over his good-bye. It was one of his faults, no doubt, to take things too seriously. When he was quite out of sight and hearing, Cynthia

rushed into the drawing-room—which was empty—and executed a wild but extremely graceful war-dance in front of the long mirror. When she was quite breathless she flung open the piano—even lifted the top to let out its full volume, and with her foot firmly planted on the pedal she thumped with all her might a barbarian valse by a barbarian and unpronounceable composer. Lady Theodosia ran into the room with her small white hands held over her ears.

"My dear Cynthia, what discord! Even the Russian person at the concert did not make such a noise."

"I am so tired of being cultured," said Cynthia, as she wound up her performance with shrieking chromatics in contrary motion. "A woman sacrifices a good deal when she undertakes to steer a possible genius. I shall go into the woods this afternoon with that stupid Edward Cargill and read him *Three Men in a Boat!*"

V.

There was never a Rachel who had not lurking possibilities of the Jezebel, nor a Jezebel who had nothing of the Rachel—in weak moments. Cynthia had no sooner gained her point with Provence, when she began to have misgivings. She was not at all sure that she had been right. She should have waited a little longer: she should have remembered that if genius has an infinite capacity for taking pains it has also the tendency to dream—a process which the practical onlooker is apt to mistake for dawdling. At first she reproached herself bitterly for her want of judgment: she had been betrayed into vulgarity: she wondered—the thought was unbearable—if Provence had a sorrowful contempt for her views on art and the artistic life. But she had always her boundless self-appreciation to come to the rescue in hours like this: when there was no longer any doubt in her mind that a mistake had been made, it did not take long to decide that Provence himself had been entirely to blame. He ought to have shown more firmness: he had given up his most cherished convictions because of some idle words she had spoken in a fit of caprice. The phrase "idle words," which her ingenious conscience had given her at less than a nod, she pounced on and worked up into a whole theory of justification. The case stood thus:—She

could not in reason be expected to marry a man whose career as yet was all promise and no execution: she was not a servant-maid nor a Rachel, to wait for her lover while he served his time: she had, in her love for him and in her anxiety to find some practical basis for their engagement, no doubt urged him to take the vulgar and tangible in preference to the æsthetic and visionary: her error was that she had spoken under the pressure of the moment, without due thought and against her own true instincts; he, being the man and the one whose career was in question, should have stood his ground and refused to be influenced. Then, how she would have respected him! She was thinking all this when the postbag arrived and in it a letter from Provence. This was the letter:—

"I cannot keep the promise I made you. I cannot say yes to Dobbs—I would rather slice ham in a cook-shop. Dearest, dearest, do understand this and give me a little time.—G. P."

She read this, trembled with anger, and was perhaps more truly in love with him than she had ever been in her life. Unfortunately, however, she did not know this, but rushed to Lady Theodosia, who was sitting alone in the drawing-room knitting charity comforters for the poor.

"That is the way he treats me," she said, giving her aunt the letter. "I am tired of him. What does he want me to do? Men are so selfish. I was a fool to listen to him in the beginning."

Geniuses are never practical," said Lady Theodosia.

"The fact of the matter is this," said Cynthia, "the artistic temperament ought not to marry"

Lady Theodosia looked her perfect agreement, but said nothing.

Cynthia began to march up and down the room. "The whole thing has been a mistake," she said; "I must put an end to it. I was not destined for a villa and a dinner of herbs."

"Some herbs are so richly gravied they might very well pass for ox," said her aunt. "If an author does get on, he gets on very well indeed."

"But how if he doesn't?" said Cynthia.

"That's the point," said Lady Theodosia; "do you feel like taking the risk?"

Cynthia looked out of the window. It was a singularly clear, bright day; in the distance she could see the clock-tower of Northwold Hall.

"No," she said, slowly, "I do not feel like taking the risk."

Lady Theodosia gave two short sighs—one for Godfrey, one for human nature—and then smiled at her niece.

"A wise decision," she said.

"Although I have been a fool," said Cynthia, "thank goodness I have not had the folly to parade about the country with my *fiancé* tacked on to my skirts. As it is, nobody knows anything about it."

"I hope he will not do anything absurd when you tell him," said Lady Theodosia.

"I shall write it," said Cynthia.

"Writing is dangerous," said her aunt.

"Not anything that I write," said Cynthia.

And then—was it fate or accident?—the door opened and Edward Cargill was announced.

"That is the man for Cynthia," thought Lady

Theodosia at once; "he would be very kind to her and keep her in comfort."

"How awfully jolly to find you in!" exclaimed that amiable gentleman. "Mother sent a lot of messages, but I forget every one of them. I hope you don't mind," and he settled down in a chair with the comfortable air of a man who has determined to be happy for, at least, an hour.

"We won't mind if you can tell us something more exciting than the messages," said Cynthia.

"You *are* sarcastic," said Edward; "it's tremendously hard on a fellow to expect him to be interesting when he comes from a dull place like ours. I don't know why it is, but houses are always the liveliest and all that sort of thing when the woman isn't one of these awfully good housekeepers. Mother is such a splendid manager," he added.

"That is a very happy remark," said Lady Theodosia, "and just reminds me that I am due at a committee-meeting in half an hour. Perhaps I shall find you here when I come back. I sha'n't be long."

"Thanks awfully," said Edward, "perhaps you will —if Miss Heathcote can stand me."

"He is really a very ingenuous, simple-hearted creature," thought Lady Theodosia as she hurried down the corridor. "He would be so grateful to Cynthia for marrying him."

When the door closed on Lady Theodosia, Edward leant forward in his chair and began to flick imaginary specks of dust off his boots with his riding-whip. Cynthia understood the movement well —it was a habit of Edward's when he was labouring under mental excitement. Among her stronger

qualities, resignation to the inevitable was perhaps the foremost. "He is now going to make a bigger fool of himself than usual," she thought.

"I like Lady Theodosia very much," he began, "but I'm not sorry she's gone."

"That's very rude."

"No, it isn't—at least, it isn't rude to tell you. It always seems so natural to tell you everything I think."

"You regard me as a kind of indulgent grandmother, in fact."

"Cynthia, how can you?"

"Don't look so tragic; it doesn't suit you."

"I don't believe you ever cared about any one in your life; I don't believe you could."

"I never tried. How should I set to work?"

"Well, you ought to let yourself go more—you must let yourself go if you want to fall in love. As it is now, I am sure you could argue yourself out of anything."

"Mustn't one argue if one is in love?"

"No; it's ever so much nicer to keep quiet and just go on loving."

"I call that very weak," said Cynthia. "I don't believe in falling in love, as you call it, to begin with; but if I felt that there was any—person—for whom I felt more—respect—than others, I should have to satisfy myself that the—person—could bear criticism."

"But if you love any one," said Edward, eagerly, "you don't want to criticise them. Don't you remember in 'Fifine at the Fair' the husband tells his wife to see herself in his soul, and not bother so much about her actual personal appearance? and of course

the same would apply to a character. Browning doesn't express it quite that way," he added, "but that is what it comes to. I got a fellow to explain it to me."

"I should have hated that husband," said Cynthia. "How I should respect a man who had the strength of character to say, 'Cynthia, if there is anything in your style, I don't admire it. You are too tall, and I don't like the colour of your hair. However——' and so on. That would be treating me like a rational being."

"My experience of women is——" said Edward; and then he blushed. "I mean," he said, "all women like to be appreciated. Anyhow," he added, desperately, "if a woman is awfully beautiful, I don't see any harm in telling her so."

"If she is—awfully beautiful—perhaps not. You see, she would probably know it."

"I don't believe you know how beautiful you are."

"How you take one's breath away! I know I am—not exactly repulsive."

"You are lovely."

"These compliments are very noisy, and—and you have no right to say them."

"No right! When you know I love the very ground under your feet."

"Well! I don't know anything of the kind, and—I wish you wouldn't."

"I can't help it."

"I should think you would have more self-respect."

"Damn my self-respect."

"Do you mistake me for your brown mare?"

"I beg your pardon—but I will damn anything or anybody that comes between us."

"How dare you talk of things coming between us? I don't understand you. You are nothing to me whatever. And as for this display of temper, I should say you had no self-respect to damn. You see I don't mince words when I speak my mind."

"Why should you—to me? You can pitch things at me, if you like."

"This conversation does not promise to end satisfactorily to either of us."

"Cynthia, will you marry me?"

"Can you presume to ask such a question—now?"

"When a man's in earnest he doesn't think of opportunities and occasions. I must know to-day whether I am to blow my brains out or not."

"Don't do anything rash, but ride home and devour an immense dinner first. I hope, too, you will sleep well after it. How can you make yourself so ridiculous?"

"You will see that I am in earnest—too late. Cynthia, once more—will you marry me?"

"I will not marry you nor any other man."

"I shall shoot myself."

"If you particularly wish, I won't stand in your way."

"Have you no heart? Are you made of stone? You know I have loved you for years—all my life—from the first time I saw you. I remember how you looked quite well. Your nurse was curling your hair round a stick, and you were keeping as quiet as a mouse. You were five and a half. And you can tell me I am nothing to you!"

"She never curled my hair; it always curled naturally! As for saying you are nothing to me, I was angry—then. I don't dislike you—in your proper place."

"Then will you marry me?"

"I will see."

"Oh, Cynthia!"

"Don't touch me, please. We are not Hodge and Betsy. And let me warn you, if you want to make me angry—so angry that I will never speak to you again—try to kiss me, or something unpleasant of that sort."

"You would soon get accustomed to it. After all, it's the most usual and natural thing to do—when one's engaged."

"Then engage yourself to some one who is usual and natural, for I am neither."

"May I tell them we are engaged?"

"Tell them we are engaged! What are you talking about?"

"You have promised to marry me, and I shall run up to town and buy you a diamond and sapphire ring. Do you like sapphires?"

"They're not bad—when they're a good colour."

"They shall be the finest."

"I prefer one—*very* nice one—set in diamonds. And, Edward, I want more than anything—if you want to be charming—a diamond pin for my hair."

"If I may kiss your little finger, you shall have two."

"Do you think I can be bribed by diamonds? Besides, *two* pins would look vulgar; I only want one."

"You have made me so happy!" and then, as he stood by her, he ventured to touch a loose piece of hair which had strayed on her forehead.

For some reason the movement reminded her of Provence. In an instant she sprang to her feet. "How dare you?" she said. "I told you not to touch me. That is what people call caressing. I hate it."

"I will never do it again."

Then, to his dismay, she burst into tears. He had never seen her in tears before.

"I won't have the diamonds," she said, passionately. "Why did you talk about them? I ought to wear sackcloth and ashes for the rest of my life."

"Dear Cynthia, I did not mean to make you angry. Forgive me."

"Will you leave me, then, for to-day? I want to think. My head aches; I am not myself." She looked at him for once—appealingly.

"You are not angry with me? You have forgiven me?"

"Yes—only go. If I seem disagreeable, I am sorry." It is not so hard as one might think to be magnanimous to a beautiful woman. Edward rode home in high spirits.

When he had gone, Cynthia went to her own room and wrote a letter to Provence:

"Dear Mr. Provence,

"From your note to-day I fear you have misconstrued some remarks of mine. It would be painful to me to point out where the mistake has arisen. Should I have said painful to both of us?

In the circumstances, however, I feel I ought to tell you that Mr. Cargill has asked me to be his wife and I have accepted him. The engagement is not yet publicly announced, and will not be until we have fixed a date for the wedding.

"Believe me,

"Yours very truly,

"CYNTHIA CREIGHTON HEATHCOTE."

She posted this herself, to make sure that it went that evening. It had no sooner left her hands than she wished it back.

The path of wisdom is almost as thorny as the path of grace—even though it may lead to diamonds, and those the finest in Bond Street.

VI.

Three months later, Cynthia returned to London from her honeymoon. Lady Theodosia thought that she looked handsomer than ever ; as a work of art she seemed more finished. Parisian dressmakers are certainly clever ; and what picture does not look better for a tasteful frame ? Her expression, however, was scarcely contented.

"Are you disappointed in Edward ?" Lady Theodosia ventured to say one day, when Cynthia seemed in a talking mood.

"How could I be disappointed in him ?" said the bride ; "is he a man who leads one to expect much ?"

"Is he kind ?" said Lady Theodosia.

Cynthia smiled. "He is manageable."

"Well," said her aunt, "that is something. I hope he is generous."

"There is Scotch blood in the family, you know," said Cynthia.

"Still, you don't regret the marriage ?" said Lady Theodosia ; "you don't think you could have done better ?"

"I make it a rule never to regret anything," said Cynthia ; "regret is a bore. I prefer to call my mistakes experience."

"I don't think you would have been happier with —a poor man," said her aunt, after a pause.

" Perhaps not," said Cynthia. " I could never feel that love is sufficient. Some people regard love as a civilized instinct ; others as a side-dish. With me it is a side-dish."

" Those who regard it as a side-dish are less likely to get into trouble," said Lady Theodosia.

" I don't know about that," said Cynthia, " because —I don't mind telling you now, since it is all over— I certainly was very much in love, in my way, with Godfrey Provence. Even at the last minute I would have broken off with Edward and married him, if he had seemed to care much about my letter, that time. I really wrote it in a temper—he might have read between the lines. It only proves how things work for the best. I know now that he didn't care for me in the least. I have not heard from him since—not a word, not a line."

" Perhaps he has been ill," suggested Lady Theodosia.

" Ill ! " said Cynthia. " His novel was published yesterday. I read the announcement in *The Times.* That does not sound like illness. No, he subordinates everything to his writing. He liked me well enough till I seemed to interfere with that. If I had had red hair and a bad complexion, he would have hated the sight of me. But then," she went on, relapsing into her former voice of indifference, " what does it matter one way or the other ? Of course, I gave myself a great deal of unnecessary unhappiness at the time. I started on my wedding tour the most miserable woman in the world. I prayed that the boat might sink which took us to Calais. I should probably have died of fright if it had. I am merely telling you all this to prove to you how silly a girl can be if she

attaches too much importance to sentiment. It is far easier to be Juliet than Cressida. You may depend that Cressida had a great deal of self-control."

"I think it is only fair to Godfrey Provence to say this—you are certainly difficult to understand. Men divide women into so many types, and when they see a woman they put her down as a representative of one of these. They like to think that if she is type *a* she will do this, if type *b* that, if type *c* the other, and so on. It is very absurd, of course, for no two women are the same any more than one wave is like another."

"If he had loved me he would have understood me," said Cynthia. "At any rate he would not have given me up so easily."

Lady Theodosia shook her head. "I don't pretend to explain either of you," she said. "You may know a tree by its fruit, but certainly not men and women by their actions."

"It has all ended now," said Cynthia, "and well enough for both of us. You can't say that of all endings."

"Well enough, yes—if it is the end." At that moment they heard Edward's voice in the hall. "I don't think that bonnet-strings suit every face," Lady Theodosia was saying as he came into the room.

"Still talking about dress?" he said. "I've got a bit of news for you which will keep you going very comfortably till dinner. Provence is married."

Neither of the women stirred; nor did they look at each other. Cynthia, perhaps, smiled a little. Edward felt that his news had fallen flat.

"He's married his cousin," he went on, "a Miss Hemingway, daughter of that Lady Hemingway who

goes in for bazaars. The girl is plain, and not much in her. These literary cusses have awfully queer tastes. They don't know what love is, poor devils!"

"Who told you about it?" said Cynthia.

"I heard it at the club," said her husband, "from a fellow who knows the bride. They say, too, his book is going to make a hit."

"When was he married?" said Lady Theodosia.

"This morning," said Edward. "I suppose it will be in the papers to-morrow. I used to think he was sweet on Agatha, always hanging about the Rectory as he did last summer."

If a new light suddenly dawned upon him he was discreet enough not to reveal the fact, but with a benedictory smile, as became a husband and the head of the house, he went out.

Cynthia was the first to speak. "I'm glad the Calais boat didn't sink," she said; "but even if it had, I can't help thinking that I should have had the best of it." Her lips curved and a dimple came into her cheek, but there was no smile in her eyes.

"I dare say this Miss Hemingway is very well suited to him," said Lady Theodosia.

"I know all about her," said Cynthia. "He once stopped at a country house with her. He told me she was a very good walker and ate an astonishingly large breakfast."

"I have certainly heard more impassioned descriptions," said Lady Theodosia.

"Nevertheless, he has married her," said Cynthia.

"Yes, he has married her," said Lady Theodosia, "and you have married Edward; but I don't think that proves anything."

"Perhaps not," said Cynthia; "a marriage rarely does prove anything. The third person who could explain is always silent." Then she said nothing for some minutes. When she spoke her face lit up with unfeigned gladness. "This Miss Hemingway has straw-coloured hair—and he detests blondes."

Then they both went to dress for dinner.

In reply to a letter from his friend the Hon. and Rev. Percival Heathcote, inquiring, among other things, about that eccentric man, Godfrey Provence, the great Dobbs wrote as follows:—

"I will not say definitely that I am disappointed in him. His book is extremely clever, and I have heard of people reading it twice. That sounds well, but of course it may not mean money. At present I should call it an artistic rather than a financial success. Still, one can only hope for the best. He takes the whole thing very queerly—says that the book may be very poor stuff, but it is at all events the best he can do. That seems to please him more than all the rest—to think it is his best. He is most extraordinary—pig-headed as a mule! (Rather mixed that.) And, Lord save us! why did he marry? Have you seen her? Talk about 'pious orgies!' She is plain, is timid, and adores: *figurez-vous.* My wife tells me she has already started a tea-gown. Provence seems rather embarrassed, and is, I should say, quietly happy—with reservations. What did he see in her? However, the soul's the stature of the man—not his wife. He may be a giant, in spite of her."

Part II.

I.

It was generally admitted in the Family—and perhaps outside it—that if any one wanted to discuss the Family, or hear news of the Family, or give advice to the Family, or make laws for the Family, it was all to be done at Mrs. Golightly's over the tea. And the Family—as the Golightlys understood the term—was a large, unlimited body, not subject to arbitrary laws and conditions: any one might belong to it, provided only that the any one was in some way or other, whether by accident or necessity or marriage or any other mysterious cause, on speaking terms with the immediate representatives or distant connexions of the Golightly stock.

On one particular afternoon, therefore—a warm, bright afternoon in May—a small party was assembled in Mrs. Golightly's drawing-room. The party consisted of that lady herself, her husband, her step-son, Lady Hemingway, and Mrs. Godfrey Provence.

"Fancy!" said Lady Hemingway, "Grace has been married three years to-day."

"And where is Godfrey?" said George Golightly.

Grace started a sigh, but checked it and smiled instead. The smile was both touching and interesting: touching because forced, interesting because it implied an *arrière pensée*. At least this was George's

analysis of it. The rest were less observant, or rather more indifferent as to the subtle lights and shades of Grace's not too-varying expression.

"Godfrey is at the Museum," she said; "he will be there all day."

In appearance and manner she had certainly improved since her marriage. Her face—formerly too red and round—was thinner and merely pink: she had perfect self-possession: she talked better: she had lived with Godfrey long enough to catch his way of looking at things—that is to say, she had caught it as a trick—she knew the view he would be likely to take of anything; as for his way of getting it, of that she knew nothing. She avoided the labyrinth. So people called her original—not knowing her husband. But the really curious thing was this: her husband thought her original too, and often admired her wit. Unconscious victim of egoism! It was his own.

"I think," went on Grace, "he quite forgot it was the anniversary of our wedding-day: so like him, you know, and I hadn't the heart to remind him."

"Good gracious!" said her mother, "don't be sentimental! You can't expect a man who works with his head to remember every little household matter."

"I don't expect it," said Grace; "you misunderstand me. I didn't remind him because he looked so happy, for him, when he started for the Museum. If I had said anything, he might have thought that he ought to stay at home, or take me to a concert or something of the sort, like an ordinary husband. Next week I dare say he will remember and be awfully grieved about it. He will think he has neglected a

duty, and then—well, whenever he feels that, I believe if I asked for the moon he would try to get it."

"You are lucky to have married such a man," said Lady Hemingway; "he's a most willing creature!"

"But she never asks for the moon," remarked George.

Grace said nothing. When she asked for anything, it was always within arm-reach after a certain amount of straining.

"By the bye," said Lady Hemingway, suddenly, "did you see in the paper yesterday morning that Sir Edward Cargill is dead. Typhoid fever. Such a pity! And he only came into the title a month ago."

"Nice young fellow—inclined to be stout—twelve thousand a year, at least," said the Captain, rapidly. "Belonged to my club—rarely dined there—dined deuced well when he did. Knew him quite well—very civil. Quite cut up to hear of his death. Only seven-and-twenty. Shocking!"

"I just mentioned him," said Lady Hemingway, "because I thought that Godfrey was friendly with the Cargills at one time. Didn't he visit them in the country—or something?"

"Oh no," said Harriet; "he knew the Heathcotes very well, and one of them married the poor man who is just dead. That's all."

"Ah!" said Lady Hemingway, "is that it?" She waited, and then—"The Cargill woman is very good-looking."

"So I've heard," said Harriet.

"Men over thirty rave about her," said Lady Hemingway. "Did Godfrey ever rave?"

Grace began to bristle at once. "Godfrey never raves about any one," she said, "but if he admires either of the Heathcote girls, it is Agatha, the eldest. He always says that she has the most regular features. I don't suppose he ever saw much of the other, for she must have been practically engaged to young Cargill the summer Godfrey was at Little Speenham."

"I see," said Lady Hemingway. She could not resist adding, however, "Clergymen's daughters are always so sly. You never know what they're up to. They usually catch the richest men in the parish."

"And play the devil with the others," added the good Captain.

"Precisely," said his sister.

"How dreadful!" murmured Harriet. Then she turned to Grace, who for some reason looked a little sulky. "How is little Elizabeth?" she said; "does she seem fond of her father?"

"Oh, yes," said Grace. "Of course she is only two—a baby really—but they get on very well."

"Does he want her to be extraordinary," said Captain Golightly—"learn metaphysics, and all that? Ugh!" He had an idea that metaphysic had something to do with medicine.

"No," said Grace, "he only wants her to be healthy. Health with him means a whole system of philosophy."

"Poor little beggar!" groaned the Captain; "and won't you have a doctor's bill—that's all."

"Clever men never have their children properly educated," said Lady Hemingway. "Grace will have to see that the child is brought up in a lady-like manner. Not that the bringing-up will matter much

one way or the other—since she's a girl. If her looks are all right, one needn't worry about anything else—except to see that her clothes suit her. But there's plenty of time for that. You can't do much with her till she's out. Of course, take care of her complexion and keep her back straight. That's quite enough to keep any mother occupied."

"If I were only stronger!" said Grace. She was always a little uneasy when interest in herself threatened to spread to her child. She had, perhaps, the irritating half-suspicion that the child repaid interest better—might eventually end even in getting it all. She had seen this very nearly happen in the case of her husband. She was fond of little Elizabeth, too; she wanted her to be noticed: to have had a plain, stupid little girl whom nobody cared about—that would have been a thorn in the flesh, and a weariness; and yet—and yet—well, it was hard to get reflected glory from one's own child. The whole principle was wrong.

"If I were only stronger!" she repeated. George looked at her, and wondered why he had never remarked—before her marriage—the clear grey of her eyes, her well-proportioned form, and her restless, nervous mouth. Then he remembered how, for a long time, he had been gradually changing his opinion with regard to Grace—changing it so much, and so gradually, that to-day, when he found himself admiring her eyes and her figure, she seemed to possess all the novelty of a new acquaintance combined with the tried charm of the old. There is nothing more fascinating to a child than an old doll with a new head. The doll, in course of time, swells the dust-

heap, but the sentiment is everlasting. It is like the worm which never dies. It overwhelmed George now. He looked at Grace again, and something in her air—a resigned, gentle melancholy—made him fear she was not happy. He felt sorry for her, and angry with Godfrey. "He doesn't understand her," he thought. "He means well, but he is too much wrapt up in his work. She wants sympathy and tenderness, and he takes her to a concert. What a stick!" The more he pondered it, the sadder he grew. "She is pining away under his neglect," he thought.

"You wish you were stronger!" said Lady Hemingway; "what is the matter with you? I wish I had a quarter of your health. Dr. Ives told me, the other day, he considered you quite the most robust woman he knows."

"Ah, well," said Grace, "I'm only too glad to hear it, I'm sure—only doctors don't know everything." Soon after that she kissed her mother and her aunt, said good-bye, and left. George Golightly took her home; he said he wanted to see Godfrey.

For a short time they walked in silence. It was Grace's suggestion that they should walk; she said she was fond of walking, but could very seldom find any one to walk with: Godfrey was a very early riser, and took his exercise before breakfast. Again she sighed, but added, "Dear Godfrey! It is such happiness to see him so completely engrossed with his work."

"You're so unselfish," said George, gruffly.

"Oh no," said Grace, "don't say that. When a woman marries a gifted man like Godfrey, one of her

first duties is surely self-effacement. You see, I regard it as a duty—not a virtue at all. I won't say that I fully realized this when I married. In those days I was very unreasonable, and hoped to keep him entirely to myself. I wanted his ideas to be given to me first, and then—well, then I thought there would be plenty of crumbs for the public. Wasn't I selfish? How could I have expected it? Of course, I soon saw how foolish I was. You know how silent he is —particularly about his writing—and then, when he has been working all day and is too tired to read, he likes to sit and think, or perhaps play with the child. If I only thought of myself, I might be tempted to wish he were a trifle more like other men, or one of those barristers who write a little. They are generally very agreeable, and just literary enough to be interesting. But I'm afraid all this sounds like grumbling—whereas I have everything to be thankful for."

"It seems to me you have a pretty dull time of it," said George.

"Well," said Grace, "doing one's duty is not the liveliest thing in life. But it is strengthening— morally if not physically. It is always comforting to feel that one is trying to do right."

"How much more noble women are than men," said George with enthusiasm, and thinking that a certain shade of brown looked awfully well with blonde hair.

"I cannot agree with you there," said Grace. "Women, I know, have often noble impulses, but they fail in acting up to them. Suppose we put it this way—that women want to be noble, and some men are."

George reflected on the sweetness of fellow-feeling. "I think Godfrey's a thoroughly good sort, you know," he said suddenly, as a sort of propitiation to his conscience for a lapse he was not quite able, or did not want to explain.

"He has fine qualities," said Grace. And again they were both silent.

Grace had no doubt married for what she considered affection. It was not very deep nor very strong, but it was essentially respectful. Perhaps, too, it was more than half gratitude. Provence was the first man who had ever taken any marked interest in her as an individual; one or two had allowed her to play piano to their fiddle; here and there one had sent her a book "with the author's compliments"; dancing men, who dined at her mother's, usually asked her for a waltz and the Lancers—somewhere at the end of a programme; men who didn't dance talked to her on politics, the theatres, religion, and other grave matters, but not one of them had ever, like Godfrey, talked to her about Herself. Until she met him, she had bowed in humiliation and self-pity to her mother's *dictum*—"Grace was cut out to be a companion to an elderly lady, in exchange for a comfortable home—the sort of thing one reads in the *Morning Post*. She will never make a good marriage." He had given wings to a clay bird: as much gratitude as one could expect from clay, she gave in return.

"Yes," she repeated, "Godfrey has fine qualities. But I wish—though, of course, no one is perfect—he would not give way to his moods. It is very difficult sometimes to please him. He doesn't find fault, you know; but just looks—well, that very trying look of

his. Not as if he thought himself better than other people—one could deal with an expression like that—but as though he felt grieved that other people were not better themselves. Do you understand? And can you imagine anything more irritating?"

"He was always like that," said George. "It's a manner that gives a lot of offence."

"Naturally it does," said Grace, "and yet I can't break him of it; in fact, I can't explain it to him. We are nearly home now," she went on. "It has been such a help to me, to be able to talk to you like this. I am so much alone with my own thoughts. I think it must be good for me to speak out sometimes."

"How is it we saw so little of each other—before you married?" said George. "I feel as though I had missed something."

Grace blushed, and stumbled a little as she walked.

"Take care," he said, and caught hold of her arm.

"Thank you," said Grace. "I think I trod on a piece of coal."

"These ruffians are not careful enough," said George, savagely. "What a ridiculous idea it is to pour coal through a hole in the pavement." And then they both laughed a little uneasily.

As they reached the house, they saw Godfrey standing on the doorstep. George turned red, and felt guilty. He did not accept Godfrey's warm invitation to stay for dinner.

Provence was carrying an immense bunch of daffodils in his hand, which he held towards his wife after Golightly had left them.

"You see, Grace," he said, "I have not forgotten, after all."

Grace had no eye for the flowers ; she saw only the amused grin on the face of a passing butcher-boy.

"My dear Godfrey," she said, "thanks awfully. But why didn't you have them sent up from the shop? It looks so odd to carry them through the streets—such a large bunch, too."

She gave them to the housemaid when she got into the house, and told her to "arrange" them for the dinner-table. Godfrey went into his study, and remembered miserably how he had once given Cynthia a field-poppy, and she had kissed it. Although he persuaded himself that she had probably thrown it into a ditch when his back was turned, he sighed. Why was transcendent virtue so much less charming in its methods than mere worldliness? It was small consolation to think that most men had wondered the same thing since the Fall of Adam ; nor did it occur to him that the fault did not rest with virtue, but with what man is too apt to mistake for it.

II.

Number one hundred and two, Curzon Street, Mayfair, was a house of mourning. That is to say, the blinds were pulled down and the servants crept about in new black dresses. In a small, brightly-furnished room at the back of the mansion the blinds were up, and the sun poured in on two ladies, one of whom was draped in crape and wore white muslin cuffs, as became the chief mourner. She was a little pale, a little subdued in her expression, extremely handsome. Her companion looked calm and dispassionate, slightly interested perhaps in a *Court Gazette* she was studying.

"For goodness' sake, Agatha, say something," said Cynthia, at last.

"Shall I read you this, dear? Can you bear it?" said Agatha. And then she proceeded to read aloud the following:—

"'The funeral of the late Sir Edward Cargill, Bart., of Northwold Hall, ——shire, and 102, Curzon Street, Mayfair, was largely attended by the deceased's many relatives and friends. The Marquis of Saltford, Lord Charles Friern, the Right Honourable Reginald Newbury, M.P., the Earl of Drumdrosset, and Lord Whetstone, who were unavoidably absent, sent their carriages. The service was most impressively conducted by the Very Rev. the Dean of Mudborough, who more than once was visibly affected. The floral tributes were numerous and costly. The costume

worn on this melancholy occasion by Lady Cargill was composed of rich Indian *cachemire* and *crêpe*, a most tasteful and appropriate *confection* from the *atelier* of Madame Adeline, 999, New Bond Street.'"

"That is too horrible," said Cynthia. "For once I did manage to rise above my dress. To have such things written about one is degrading. I won't stand it."

"You must think how much good it will do Madame Adeline," said Agatha, smoothly. "One ought not to be selfish in such matters."

"I am tired of living. Everything I touch turns to mud."

"Poor dear! I suppose you will go abroad. There is really nothing else for you to do. May is such an awkward month for a death—just at the beginning of the season."

"I shall remain where I am," said Cynthia. "Why should I run away?"

"You will stay in town! That is so like you, dear. You always want to do the most improper thing you can think of. Surely you must see that you cannot remain here—and be even a little bit cheerful. People would talk. Whereas abroad, so long as you wear mourning, you can do anything."

"I shall not leave London," said Cynthia, firmly. "I have talked it over with Aunt Theodosia. She is coming to stop with me; and I shall take up some kind of study, and—and try to be a little more serious."

She began her speech defiantly enough, but towards the end her voice grew faint.

The spark of amusement in Agatha's eyes seemed struck out of flint stones.

"I *can* be serious," said Cynthia.

"I don't think it would suit you if you were," said her sister.

The desire to please, combined with a painful sensitiveness to anything approaching ridicule, from no matter how contemptible a critic, was the essential weakness in Cynthia's character. She had enough sense to be conscious of this, and the knowledge was gall and wormwood; for she liked to think herself proud and independent, with a mind above other people's opinions. But, as she told Lady Theodosia, in one of her rare bursts of confidence, "What is the use of despising their opinions when I am at the mercy of their giggles?" That morning Agatha's cold smile was almost more than she could bear. She was on the point of promising to go abroad, the next day if need be, when another powerful weakness—namely, obstinacy—came to the rescue. She got up and put on her bonnet.

"Where are you going?" said Agatha.

"I am going to the British Museum," said Cynthia, flushing a little. "I am not likely to meet any one I know there, and this veil is thick. I can't sit here all day."

"You had much better lie down and have some beef-tea," said Agatha. "But of course if you insist upon going, and don't feel yourself that it's the most extraordinary, unheard-of thing to do, in the circumstances, it isn't for me to interfere."

"I wish you wouldn't look meek, Agatha, when you know you want to be disagreeable."

The sorrowful reproach on Agatha's countenance—which meant plainly that, although Cynthia might

forget herself, she (Agatha) could only offer her other cheek to be smitten—filled her sister with remorse.

"Would you like that hat-pin?" she said.

Agatha looked at the ornament, saw that it had pearls on it, and swallowed her indignation with a smile.

"Are you sure you don't want it yourself, dear?"

So peace was restored.

Apart from the fact that her husband had been dead little more than a fortnight, and conventionality demanded that she should retire more or less from the public view for the present, or, as Agatha suggested, go abroad, Cynthia's visit to the Museum did not fill Lady Theodosia, nor the Dowager Lady Cargill, with any great surprise. Cynthia went to the Museum frequently; so frequently, in fact, that Lady Cargill—prepared for the heathenish always in the case of her daughter-in-law—almost feared that she went there for the purpose of worshipping the Pagan gods. Lady Theodosia simply explained it as a "fancy." Agatha called it affectation. Cynthia, herself, said it was a rest.

If they had seen her that particular morning, wandering through the long galleries like some uneasy spirit, they would have thought that her idea of rest was somewhat inadequate. Her unusual height and grace, her deep mourning, and what her maid called "her way of putting on her clothes," attracted considerable attention from the intelligent public, who were scattered in thin groups through the various rooms. One man, who happened to be entering as she crossed the front hall, felt his heart leap at the sight of her. Then she turned her head in his direc-

tion. She stopped short, caught her breath, and cried "Godfrey!" By the time he reached her she had regained her self-command. "What a mercy it is," she said, "that people are eating their luncheon! They would have stared. But—you surprised me."

When a man loses his head it generally takes him some time to find it again. He feels as though he has to recognize it among a lot of other lost heads; for the moment he is not at all certain which is the right one—his own. Woman, more dexterous, catches it on the rebound.

"I too was surprised," said Godfrey. For the rest he could only remember that he had not seen her for more than three years: that she was the same Cynthia, that he was the same Provence: that they could no longer be the same to each other.

"I just came here for a change—I often do," said Cynthia. "I am not studying anything or going in for anything," she hastened to explain. "I suppose it's a fad."

"Have you seen the new mummy?" said Godfrey.

Cynthia laughed softly. "On the stage," she said, "we should have slow music for this situation, and then we should say appropriate things. What a help slow music would be in real life! But, since we have not got it, let us hunt for the mummy." So they started blindly down the gallery nearest them.

"I read the notice in *The Times*," said Godfrey. "I am sorry."

Cynthia reproached herself for having forgotten—in the first joy of seeing Provence again—a grief which it was certainly her duty to remember. Before she

had married Edward she had something like affection for him: as her husband she had found him intolerable; when he was dead the old affection, half-pitying and protective, came back; his faults, seen through the mist of a crape veil, seemed pathetic weaknesses calling for compassion rather than blame: his virtues could be counted. There were tears in her eyes when she answered Provence. "I cannot tell you all about that yet," she said. "It was terrible that he should die. He liked to live. Life was never dull to him: he thought it jolly, never anything else—only jolly. You won't think that's an absurd way for me to put it—you will understand. He, who thought this, is dead, whilst others——" She paused. She was not sure that life seemed so utterly worthless to her at that moment as it had—say, before she left Curzon Street for the Museum.

"You have changed a little since I last saw you," she said, abruptly. She did not like to add that he looked many years older. "Do you like success better than you thought you would?"

"I must have changed more than a little, to have you ask that," he answered. "Is conceit the usual accompaniment of wrinkles?"

"I did not say you were wrinkled," said Cynthia. "If you fly at me like that, for nothing, I shall soon know that you have not changed at all."

"Cynthia!"

"Yes, I mean it. And I think it would be a pity to quarrel, just yet, because there are a lot of things we might like to tell each other. Or—" then she stopped quite still and looked at him swiftly and

coldly; he knew the glance well—"perhaps you would rather not talk to me at all and I am taking too much for granted."

For answer he also gave a look which she, too, apparently knew well. Words would have been poor in comparison.

"Oh, my dearest!" she said, "why did you not write to me, that time? We have lost three years." For once in her life she spoke to him from her heart, and he caught a glimpse of the real woman. As an actress she was dangerously good: her art was more convincing than the average woman's nature: now she was natural it seemed to Provence, in comparison, as though a queen had been playing beggar-maid. But, as a man may wake from rosy dreams to find himself staring at a mud wall, she threw on her rags again before he could answer.

"I am getting sentimental," she said, hurriedly; "when I'm sentimental I'm tedious. You do the talking now. You haven't told me . . . Oh, Godfrey, I've just remembered!—you've got a wife."

He had never been more conscious, more completely, hopelessly conscious of this fact, almost to the exclusion of all other facts, in his life. He saw that if farcical comedy became personal it might cease to be amusing.

"Yes," he said, "there is Grace."

"Is that her name? I don't dislike it. It sounds like the good heroine in a novel—the patient, forgiving one who has a sweet expression. Is that being rude?"

"She isn't a woman you can sum up in a phrase. She has a great deal of quiet reserved force, and she

doesn't get to one point and stick there. She developes. I have the highest possible regard for her," he added ; with an absence, however, of spontaneity.

"Oh !" said Cynthia.

"She had everything against her, as a girl," he went on ; "her mother was a very worldly woman and she lived in a worldly set. Yet with it all Grace managed to assert her own individuality and keep her interests centred in better things."

"I see," said Cynthia. "What were the better things ?"

"Oh, well, I couldn't catalogue them. I gathered from what she said that the life she was leading did not satisfy her, and—that—well, with—with different surroundings and with people—or even one person—who could understand her, she might realize her better self. It was stunted, you know, situated as she was."

"Yes, I know," said Cynthia.

"That's really all," he said. "She didn't mind marrying me, and I thought, as I could never be happy myself, I might at least try to make some one else less miserable."

"Is she pretty ?" said Cynthia, at once.

"She has charm, but she is not a beautiful woman —that is, as I understand beauty. But then, beauty is not everything."

"Oh no, it isn't everything, only—it's rather nice to have about."

"I think," he said, "we ought to go up these stairs —if we want to find the mummy."

"I am not particularly anxious to see the mummy," said she ; "are you ?"

"Oh, Cynthia, you are just the same."

"You can't see very much through this thick veil."

"I was not thinking of your face."

"Oh! . . . Have I grown dreadfully plain?" She seized this opportunity to lift her veil up.

"No, you haven't," he said.

"I wish I were different," she sighed. "I should probably be better looking if my mind were nicer. I really do want to be more useful—I have got money now. Don't you think I might take an interest in hospitals and things?"

"By all means. I should send one of them a big cheque or found a Cargill Ward. The Cargill Ward, I think, might sound better, and really would not be any more trouble. I don't know, however, whether it would alter the shape of your nose or change the colour of your hair."

"You needn't be so brutal. You always make the worst of me."

"I wish I could think that I did. It is so disheartening to see a woman with any amount of honesty about her wilfully and deliberately contorting it all into something very different."

"Love me for my faults and not my virtues, dearest, and then I shall never disappoint you. I can always live up to *them*." Again that tantalizing glimpse of the real Cynthia. Not to defy the codes of polite society, not to kiss her at once, not to forget mummies and Grace—for at least one moment—required some self-restraint. Let any man imagine himself similarly situated. Godfrey dared not trust his tongue. So he said nothing.

Cynthia continued: "Of course, I can't change myself and not love you, just because you are married. There is no etiquette about loving. I shall always love you—always—always. I would tell your wife so." This idea seemed to please her. "I should be proud to tell her; but perhaps she wouldn't like it. It's a very strange thing, but although a woman may love a man herself, she can rarely forgive another woman for loving him."

"That wouldn't apply to Grace," he said, quickly; "love was a question we never raised."

"Then she doesn't love you?" said Cynthia.

"Certainly not."

"Then she ought. I've no patience with her."

"But I don't love *her*," said Provence; "have you no patience with me?"

"That's quite a different thing. She probably isn't lovable. . . . I don't think I like Grace very much."

"You're both so utterly unlike. You wouldn't understand each other."

"I think we should understand each other well enough—if it comes to that. I'm sure I don't want to say uncharitable things, but it certainly wasn't nice of her to marry you when she didn't love you. I can't forgive that."

"But, Cynthia——" He did not like to remind her of her own marriage. She saw, however, what was in his mind.

"There is no comparison between her case and mine," she said. "*I* was in a temper. You had certainly tried me very much. You know, Godfrey, you can be very trying indeed when you like."

"Trying! That is one of Grace's words."

"Is it? I will never use it again. . . . And what does she mean by calling you trying—you, of all men in the world? Trying, indeed! She must be very bad-tempered and—how dare she say such a thing?"

"She is not at all bad-tempered—on the contrary, she is considered extremely amiable. I think she is, myself."

"Who couldn't be—with you? She can't help herself."

"But you were just saying how I once put you in a temper."

Cynthia's eyes darkened with reproach.

"I loved you. That made it another matter—and besides, it was all my fault. There! Have I not suffered enough for it?"

"Has no one else suffered?"

"Well, yes," said Cynthia. "I dare say poor Edward had rather a life of it."

He had no answer for that.

"Did you ever wonder what we should say to each other, if we met again?" said Cynthia. "I have, often. I used to think I should say, 'How do you do, Mr. Provence? How is your wife, and the baby? Isn't it a curious day?' and then I thought we should shake hands very stiffly, and perhaps you might introduce me to your wife and—and—"

"And what?"

"And that I should hate her with all my might, and go home and say what a hideous gown she had on and—howl. It only shows that things never happen the way you think they will. To begin with, I knew, the moment I saw you, that it would be quite, quite impossible to call you Mr. Provence. Then

I knew that if your wife had been with you I would not have spoken to you for five kingdoms, and then, I felt all over that in spite of the three years and Grace and Edward, after all, we still loved each other just as much, perhaps more, than we ever did—and—and it only proves that love is immortal, and tempers and things and whole centuries have nothing whatever to do with it. I know now that, even if we should never see each other again, it will be the same always."

"But I shall see you again," said Godfrey, who did not care for the "if."

"Will you come to Curzon Street—not to-morrow perhaps, but the next day—about four? Aunt Theodosia is with me, and I shall make her stay a long time. Agatha and Lady Cargill go back to Speenham this evening. Agatha came up for the funeral—and her summer clothes."

"So Agatha is not married?"

"She is waiting for Sir Galahad. I think she deserves him; but—if he does come—I dare say she will wonder whether he deserves her. . . . I suppose I ought to go home now. I don't want to go."

"I suppose you must," said Godfrey, just beginning to realize with despair that they would have to grow accustomed to partings.

"You will come the day after to-morrow?"

"I will come," he said.

She did not shake hands with him when they parted, but pinched his coat-sleeve. When she got into her hansom she kissed the fingers which had touched him. "Good-bye," she said, and drove off.

Although his regard for Grace was still the highest

possible, he did not think it a pity that Cynthia was so extremely unlike her.

Lady Theodosia was very much struck by her niece's altered appearance at dinner that evening. Her cheeks were red, and her eyes seemed lit by a hundred fires, and all of them blazing. Following her invariable policy, Lady Theodosia asked no questions, but talked soberly and appropriately of solicitors, travelling-bags, and quinine. Her discretion, however, was not rewarded until she announced her intention, after a very slow evening, of going to bed.

"Don't go yet," said Cynthia. "I've got something to tell you."

"I know," said Lady Theodosia, "you've seen him."

"How did you guess?"

"You look as though you had," said her aunt, drily.

"He is just the same," said Cynthia; "there is no one like him."

"My dear! Surely his wife isn't dead."

"Don't speak of her, she's detestable."

"Wives always are detestable," murmured Lady Theodosia. "'*Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife, he would have written sonnets all his life?*' Byron said that, and he was a married man. But wives and cats have nine lives."

"I don't want anything to happen to the creature," said Cynthia. "I only want to ignore her. Oh, what a mistake—what a fatal mistake he made when he married, and what a designing thing she must have been!"

"Did he say so?"

"Of course not—as if he would! You know he didn't. No, he said she hated the world and wanted better things, which he couldn't catalogue, and was extremely amiable and developed; and she has charm, and he has the highest possible regard for her. Isn't that quite enough to show that she must be horrid? He will be certain to find her out sooner or later, that's one comfort. I don't believe in these women who revere their husbands, and these husbands who regard their wives—that is to say if their reverence and regard are worth having. If a man and a woman are constantly together, they must either dislike each other frankly or like each other frankly, without any beating about the bush with respect and the rest of it: that's common sense, and if they don't, one's deceitful and the other—"

"Is a fool?" said Lady Theodosia.

"No—an angel."

"Are more men than women angels?"

"All the angels we know anything about are men," said Cynthia. "Godfrey is coming to see me the day after to-morrow," she added, presently.

"There will be trouble," said Lady Theodosia, shaking her head. "Be advised by me—don't see him again. This is infatuation—the most dangerous disease in the world."

"Disease!" said Cynthia. "Infatuation may be disease—love is life."

"Lady Theodosia turned even pale. "I never heard anything like it," she said. "Who would have guessed you had it in you? Can't you see that you're talking in a highly disgraceful manner? It's positively indecent. Edward not cold in his grave, and Provence

with a wife! I see nothing in the future but the Divorce Court."

"Is that the trouble you mean?" said Cynthia. "Do you suppose for one moment that love like ours takes people to the Divorce Court? How little you must know about it!"

"It is so easy to talk like that at the beginning. Human nature is human nature."

"But human nature isn't love," said Cynthia.

Lady Theodosia shifted her ground. "But the look of the thing—how will it look? He will be coming here continually, and people will talk; perhaps his wife will hear of it. You may put it any way you like, the outlook is unpleasant."

"He is not the kind of man people could say things about. You have only to look in his face to see that."

"We are not all Cynthias in love. Besides, physiognomy doesn't go for much in a scandal. I will admit that I think he could be trusted. So far as evil—of one sort—goes, I don't really fear for either of you much. The Drumdrosset women, with all their faults, have no mud on their petticoats. What I am trying to urge upon you is this—that whenever there is a wife or a husband to be ignored, there is mischief."

"If that is all, I won't ignore her. I will go and see her and say, 'Madam, I love the very ground under your husband's feet!' What could she do?"

"First, she would think you mad; then, that in any circumstances you would be a very dangerous acquaintance for her husband. Heaven only knows what she would do."

"I suppose you are right. Only very dangerous people tell the truth about themselves: the wise try to tell it about other people; the discreet avoid it altogether."

"It is useless to talk reason to you in your present mood. At the same time I don't see how you can expect me to take you seriously. Here is a man you have not seen for three years; when you last saw him you jilted him—"

"I did not see him, I wrote; if I had seen him it would never have happened."

"I can't go into all that; at all events, he was jilted. Now you see him again, and come home and tell me that you love the ground under his feet. If I were asked the reason, I should say—"

"Well? What would you say?"

"I should say it was simply because he is out of your reach—or ought to be."

"He was mine first—he is still mine. He does not love the other woman."

"My dear Cynthia, you forget. You are the other woman—she is his wife."

"I don't believe that God thinks she is his wife!"

"People are so fond of quoting God, when the Law is inconvenient! And when God is inconvenient, they quote the Law."

"There is no law, either of God or man, to forbid my loving Godfrey. You may cut off your hand or pluck out your eye: but love is the very soul of you—you can't touch it."

"Dear! dear!" said Lady Theodosia; "if women once begin to talk about their souls they're

done for. I must say I always thought there was none of that nonsense about you."

"I never thought so either," said Cynthia; "that's the delightful part of it all. You know the story of the Sleeping Princess."

"If I remember the story," said Lady Theodosia, "for one Princess asleep there was a palace full of snoring bores. And that just illustrates what I'm driving at. It is only now and then that a woman has a soul, and she generally happens in poetry and is always improper. Look at Haïdee."

"You make *Don Juan* your gospel! How could a creature with any self-respect—quite apart from a soul—care for a Don Juan?"

"My dear Cynthia, it does not matter in the least what a man *is*—everything depends on what a woman thinks him to be."

"I am not mistaken in Godfrey," said Cynthia, quickly.

"Did I say you were? I should say he was far more likely to be mistaken in you."

"Don't you think there is anything decent about me?" said Cynthia, passionately. "Is he the one human being in the world who has faith in me?"

"And you jilted him!" said Lady Theodosia.

"I did—I did. And to think that in spite of that, he can still call me honest—do you suppose that makes me care for him less? If I am worthless—if you are all right and he is all wrong—what then? Shall I not love him better for the mistake? After all, my love is real enough: there is no mistake about that."

"You have been a long time finding it out."

"You mean it has stood the test of time."

"Ah! You see, you didn't marry Godfrey."

"How can I expect you to understand my feelings?"

"I understand too well, and fear."

"Fear!" said Cynthia, scornfully. "What is fear? Fear is for cowards."

"And for lookers on," said Lady Theodosia.

"If people talked, what could they say?" said Cynthia, after a very long silence. "Surely he can call here sometimes. There is no harm in that."

"It isn't as though you were his wife's most intimate friend," said Lady Theodosia.

"What vile minds people must have! Let them say what they like about me."

"May they say what they like about him? Do you want to see him pointed at? I dare say you are right and they won't be able to say much—but it will be enough. You must remember he is a well-known man. Any little bit of gossip about literary people and artists and all that set is always pounced on and exaggerated. It makes them more interesting, in a low sense. You may tell me that love is stronger than death—than destruction—than the world. You will soon see that it is not stronger than scandal. Your love will bring him nothing but evil. You will be his stumbling-block."

"If I thought that, I would kill myself," said Cynthia.

Lady Theodosia waved her hand impatiently. "I thought you prided yourself on your courage. Meet your folly and conquer it. You will tell me that Godfrey is a man not easily influenced; that he of

his own free will loved you, and always will love you ; that he never has loved and never will love any one else. I grant all that. But all men are very much what women make them : their wills may be iron, but women don't attack them through their wills. They throw spells over their judgment. Sometimes the spell works for good—more often for evil ; for women as a rule are meaner than men—though men are mean enough, Heaven knows."

"Do you think that my influence over Godfrey would be mean ?" said Cynthia.

"No," said her aunt, speaking more gently, "if you were his wife it would only be for good. I used not to think so—now I feel sure of it. But as you are not his wife, your influence is only—can only be—dangerous. I don't pretend to be a good woman : you are much better, much stronger than I am really, and I want you to be always better. I—once—had an influence ; I did not use it well. When I thought I was most proving my love, I was most thinking of myself."

Cynthia coloured painfully and began to tremble.

"Sometimes," said Lady Theodosia, "a woman can best show her love for a man by leaving him. In some cases it is the only thing she can do. Be brave, Cynthia."

"I will do what is best for him," said Cynthia. "As for me—without him there can be no best." Again there was a long silence. "I am asking so little," said Cynthia, at last, "so very little. Only to see him sometimes. It isn't much."

"Each time you see him it will be harder to say good-bye. Remember that."

"I am used to hard things. Have I not suffered enough these three long years—without him? And all that time I have never even mentioned his name: I have only thought of him—thought of him always."

"I am not asking you to forget him. But it is your duty to help him to forget you. Any woman can give up the world for a man—that is easy enough. When it comes to giving *him* up, for his own sake, it is another matter. If a woman can do that, it should atone for many sins."

Cynthia drew a long breath which sounded rather like a sob; then she went up to her bedroom. She came down half an hour later with a letter in her hand. Lady Theodosia saw that it was addressed to Godfrey. Cynthia posted it herself, as she had posted another letter nearly four years before. When she returned from the post it seemed as though she had lost her beauty. She was like one changed to stone.

"I have done it," she said to her aunt; "he will hate me when he reads it. When do you think I shall be able to cry?"

"I have not cried for twenty years," said Lady Theodosia—at which they both laughed. And yet it is said that women have no sense of humour.

III.

George Golightly was a barrister, of the kind known as rising. He was considered extremely safe for a safe case ; to employ him for the defence meant professionally and to those who knew, that if one had fallen there was very little to prove it. To employ him for the prosecution meant that one was in possession of strong evidence, perhaps injured, not impossibly respectable. He worked hard and regularly : he made a good income : he dined with his banker—when he had no better engagement : the Lord Chief Justice called him Golightly : the wives of the Queen's Counsels gave him at least a fortnight's notice when they asked him to dinner. In Lady Hemingway's phrase—he held a position. To be rising is in many respects more agreeable than to have risen. In one case it is all looking forward, in the other it is all looking back—and looking back is not the joyfullest work in the world. Lot's wife was an allegory. George, therefore, was happy as mortals go. One morning, however, he awoke and was not happy—on the contrary, feverish, worried, and with no head for business. He had been dreaming of his cousin's wife. He tried to eat—he tried to read : he thanked God—being orthodox—that it was Sunday and he could be stupid without causing comment. He started for a walk and found himself making towards Bloomsbury : he turned back when he was in

sight of Montague Street and Grace's window and walked back almost as far as Regent Circus. Then he hailed a hansom and went to Montague Street again. This time he went into the house.

Grace was at the piano when he was shown into the drawing-room.

"Godfrey is out," she said, and blushed a little.

"If he won't be long I can wait," said George; "but don't stop playing on my account, unless you are tired. I have had rather a bad night. Some music is just what I want."

"I did not sleep very well either," said Grace. "I suppose it's the weather—the sudden change."

"I dare say it is," said George, but they each avoided the other's eyes.

"What shall I play?" said Grace, hurriedly.

He began to turn over the loose music by her side. "What is this?" he said. "Gounod and Shelley. '*The fountains mingle with the river.*' I should like that."

"I will sing it," said Grace. She had a clear, rather melodious voice, and it had been well-trained. On that particular day she sang even better than usual, and managed to throw something which passed for passion into the song. But the song itself easily passes for passion, on paper.

When she had finished, George cast about him for something to say. "That is Art," he got out at last, "the real thing. Thank you."

"It is a man's song really," said Grace.

"Why?"

"Well, I think a man ought to sing it. Of course it is a man speaking. A woman wouldn't make love

quite—quite that way. She wouldn't like to. You see it is rather—you know—rather—"

"Oh, yes, of course, it is rather—"

"It is very like Shelley, in fact."

"One can't help thinking," said George, after another long pause, "that Shelley knew what he was writing about. It's awfully true, what he says."

"Is it?" said Grace, playing Gounod's accompaniment very softly to fill the gaps in the conversation.

"Well, isn't it?"

"I don't know. It doesn't sound much like Godfrey, for instance."

"Oh! . . . Godfrey. Poor dear old Godfrey—hardly! He's an awfully good sort, but really—you know—he's got no more poetry about him than—than a whale."

"You shall not make me laugh!" and then she began a series of rather musical giggles. George noticed that she had a dimple in her cheek.

"You must admit it's the truth," he said; "he is a stick, isn't he? Bless him!"

"How can you? He's a kind, excellent husband—mama says so." At this she laughed till the tears came. A cold-blooded observer would have said she was inclined to be hysterical.

"I like to see a man with some passion about him," said George.

"What is passion, really?" said Grace. "I always associate it with bad temper." Her expression was that of a mild-eyed saint—in a glass window. Saints in real life are made of sterner stuff.

"Passion is—is Shelley and that sort of thing," said George, largely.

"I see. That explains what mama meant once when she told me never to mention it. She said it was a man's expression: that ladies never spoke of it. I was very young and inexperienced at the time, and I didn't understand her. But I don't think that girls ought to read poetry. It only fills their heads with ideas, and perhaps hopes, which can never be realized. Mama was right."

"Why do you say 'never realized' so sadly?"

"Was I sad?"

"Very."

She played a wrong note. "One cannot help thinking," she said.

"Thinking what, Grace?"

"Of things," she said.

"I, too, think of things," he said, eagerly. "I think how different they might have been."

"It is too late now," she murmured, "we mustn't."

"I suppose we mustn't."

"We ought not," said Grace, severely.

"Thoughts will come," said George; "they're the very devil for coming."

"We won't talk about it," said Grace.

"I'm not sure that it isn't better to face facts and thresh them out," said George, who was pacing the floor.

"It requires so much courage, and I dare not." George knelt by her side and took both her hands. "You dare not? Then, Grace, you do—"

"Yes, I do—" Her face was so near and so pink he thought it was folly not to kiss her.

"That was wrong," said Grace; "there is Godfrey and little Elizabeth—"

"Where?" said George, springing to his feet.

"—to be considered," said Grace.

"Confound little Elizabeth!"

"How can you? And I'm her mother."

"But Godfrey is her father," said George. "I have to take that into account. Why on earth did you marry him?"

"Don't be cruel to me, George. I—I didn't know any better." George could not help thinking how very unpleasant she would seem, if he didn't happen to be in love with her. As it was, an indefinable fear began to creep over him. He wished he had never seen her; and kissed her again. This reassured him to a certain extent. It was absurd to be afraid of a woman he could kiss—and so easily.

"I should never consider the child before you," said Grace—"you are first. I would not like to take her away from Godfrey; he's so fond of her."

"Take her away!" stammered George; "of course not."

"You know I never did care for the world," continued Grace, softly; "the world is nothing to me. I have often thought of this day; I knew it would have to come sooner or later. But now it has come, you must give me time to think, before I decide on any definite step."

"Of course," said George, feeling something like dislike for her.

"I cannot endure my life as it is," she went on. "We could begin a new life—together in Italy."

"Do you mean—we could run away?"

She nodded her head. "There is nothing else to do." She was tired of Montague Street, tired of her child, tired of Godfrey, tired of herself—above all, tired of being poor. "There is nothing else to do," she repeated, "is there? As you say, it is best to face facts. People would talk a little at first, no doubt, but they would soon get used to it. You see we can marry afterwards. That will make it all right."

George could only think of himself as a rabbit caught in a trap. He had nibbled the lettuce, and now he felt the iron teeth.

"We—perhaps we ought not to forget—everybody, Godfrey and your mother—"

"We must not judge them by our selves. They have not so much feeling as we have, you must remember. Besides, Godfrey could get damages."

George started as though he had been stung. "Damages! Oh! he would never get damages."

"Husbands always do, dear," she said, sweetly. Then she pointed to the window. "See the rain!" she cried. "It will not be like this in Italy."

"Then she put one of her arms round his neck and leaned her head against his breast. She looked, somehow, simple enough and rather piteous. She was a little woman—he towered above her, and she had said that she loved him. He felt like a pillar of strength. Could he be harsh to a clinging, pathetic creature, with long eye-lashes? He put aside any consideration as to his loving her, and resolved to make the best of it.

"You will be kind to me, George," she whispered. "Remember that I am giving up everything for you!"

He ordered champagne with his dinner that evening and drank far too much of it, hoping it would make him feel happy. He explained to the brother barrister who shared his chambers—an amiable man who knew any amount about Gregorian Music, and tippled—that it was the funeral banquet to his career.

"My dear old chap," said his friend, "for God's sake, don't you take to the bottle as well. See what it has made of me."

"There are worse things than the bottle," said George, wildly.

"You don't mean to say it's a woman."

The unhappy young man hung his head.

"Shoot her!" cried his friend; "shoot her! A rope round your neck is a trifle compared to a woman, and hanging is quick."

George hid his face in the sofa cushions and sobbed.

"You've been drinking," said the friend, "and your nerves are queer. But shoot her! She's carrion already."

IV.

"You wrote to me once before, Cynthia."

"Why do you remind me of that? It doesn't help us to-day. The truth of the matter is that there is really nothing trustworthy about me. I don't know my mind from one moment to the next. The one thing certain seems to be this—in some way or other I must find amusement."

"Then when you spoke to me at the Museum as you did, it was for amusement?"

"Yes—if you like. I had been dull so long, and I couldn't resist the temptation. When I reached home I thought better of it, and I wrote as I did. In the circumstances I think that was rather decent—for me. I was afraid you might take me too seriously—again. An unnecessary fear, no doubt; but give me the credit of trying to put things right. It is not often that I want to do even that."

They were both in the drawing-room at Curzon-street. Cynthia was sitting in an armchair; Provence was standing by the fireplace. He looked pale and careworn—Cynthia smiling and ironical.

"I refuse to believe that letter. If you did not speak the truth at the Museum, the whole world is a lie."

"No, Godfrey, not the whole world—only me. Besides, I never said I didn't like you: I couldn't say that. But there is a difference between liking and

loving. I can't love any one—I have tried. I have no love to give, and I am not worth loving. Believe me; do believe me."

"Are you being fair to yourself—or me—now?"

"Believe me!" she repeated.

"I believe in you always," he said, quietly. "If faith could understand, it wouldn't be faith."

"If I loved you, how much I would love you for saying that!" She saw she had said too much and hastened to atone for it. "That really explains my feeling for you from the beginning. I always wanted to love you and—couldn't. That is why I think it will be so much happier, for both of us, never to see each other again. Your life is full of many things—first of all, your work. Love that, it will repay you better than loving me. As for my life, that will pass pleasantly enough. I have got what I always wanted—money. I would have loved you, only I loved money more. It was my first love, and I have been faithful to it. That should be a redeeming quality, shouldn't it? You can say I have been faithful to one love. That can't be said of every woman." She rose from her chair, and as she stood by him brushed a short golden hair from his coat-sleeve. She held it up to the light and it curled round her finger.

"That belongs to your child," she said, "not to Grace. I call that a rather pretty omen." The clock struck seven. "In an hour's time," she said, "Aunt Theodosia and I shall be starting for Dover. Agatha was quite right. I shall find it gayer abroad. Good-bye, and—Godfrey—believe me, but don't hate me."

And so they parted.

When Lady Theodosia came in a few moments later, she found Cynthia standing cold and passive where Provence had left her—by the fireplace. As her aunt entered she looked at the clock. "I suppose," she said, "we ought to hurry, or we shall lose the train."

Lady Theodosia's heart beat high with pride when she remembered that, after all, this self-control ran in the family.

It was not until Provence had wandered blind and despairing through the streets for more than two hours that he remembered a note he had in his pocket from Golightly's tippling friend. This note had evidently been written under considerable agitation, and entreated him to call that day. Provence decided to forego the grim pleasure of brooding over his own misery, and drove to Golightly's chambers.

The tippling friend, whose name was Collingwood, received him.

"Thank God, you've come," he said. "I'm in a devil of a way. I want to talk to you about Golightly. He's in trouble. God knows what's up, but something is going to happen. I feel it."

"What is the trouble?" said Provence.

"The usual trouble," roared Collingwood; "Potiphar's wife."

"Are you quite sure you know what you're talking about?"

"I don't know who the woman is, but I know she's a bad one. When a man talks of ruining himself for a woman he can't conscientiously call an angel till he's

drunk two bottles of champagne, she must be awful—perfectly awful. But they're all awful—hell-cats every man-jack of 'em. He won't listen to me. He always says, 'You're a dear old sort, Collingwood, but you're drunk.' That's the worst of letting your friends know you've got a weakness—they despise you when you want to help them. But *you* can get at him—he's got respect for you. He hasn't any for me."

"I can't do anything unless I have some facts to go on. You must see that yourself."

"Facts! Damn facts. I go by symptoms. I tell you the man is trying to drink himself into love—and he can't succeed. I've been trying to drink myself out of it for the last twenty years, and, take my word for it, Provence, it's a hopeless game in either case. I'm very fond of Golightly—he's been damned good to me. If he comes to grief, I shall lose my faith in human nature." He pushed the decanters towards Provence and poured out a glass of brandy for himself—which he swallowed, and again another—which he looked at.

"Have you any suspicion—any idea who she is?"

"Not the faintest. He told me I should probably know quite soon enough. He said this much, that her husband was a brick. I consider that a bad sign—his calling the husband a brick. It's too unusual. It proves conclusively the Potiphar theory."

"I will do what I can," said Provence, "but of course a matter of this kind wants very delicate handling. My wife has a great deal of tact, and he is very fond of her. I wonder if she could help us."

"Ah," said Collingwood, dropping his jaw, "*you've* got a wife; I forgot that."

"What do you mean?" said Godfrey.

"Nothing. But I always forget that fellows have got wives."

"Yes, I will talk it over with her," continued Provence. "She will be able to give very good advice."

"Women are so deep," said Collingwood.

"My wife isn't deep," said Provence, getting rather angry; "that is not a word I care for."

"Look here," said Collingwood, "I like you—it's a funny thing to say, but I do. At one time I didn't. And let me tell you this—Golightly thinks a lot of you. Don't be hard on him, now he's in a scrape. He's weak, and that woman has a hold on him. But there's stuff in him yet."

Provence wished him good-night and left him maundering in this strain over the brandy-decanter.

When he reached home it was past eleven, but Grace was reading in the drawing-room. She was dressed in a lace tea-gown, and he thought she was looking even pretty: very innocent, too, and child-like. He was filled with remorse to think that the shadow of his lonely, monotonous life had fallen on so light and airy a being.

"Were you sitting up for me, Grace?" he said.

She yawned. "I don't mind the sitting up." She did not think it necessary to add that George Golightly had been there the greater part of the evening. "I should like to be told, though," she went on, "when you intend to dine out."

"I haven't dined at all," he said; "but I'm very

sorry if you delayed dinner for me. I have had one or two things to bother me to-day. I'm afraid George is in trouble. From all I hear from Collingwood, he has got into some entanglement with a married woman. Of course, I can be sure of one thing. Even if it comes to the worst, George would have to persuade himself that he was doing the right thing. He's rather easily led, but he would never act dishonourably with his eyes open. I would stake my life on that. I wish I could find out who the woman is. Things may not be so bad as they seem. Can you think of any one?"

Grace shook her head. "Don't worry about it," said Godfrey, kindly; "you look quite pale and upset already. I ought not to have told you when you were so tired."

"I hate Collingwood," she said, faintly. "I don't believe one word he says."

"But now I think of it, I have noticed a change in George lately myself," said Provence. "I can hardly explain it, but he seems different. He used to be very frank and boyish in his manner; now he seems cold and reserved. Sometimes I have fancied he wanted to avoid me. . . . What a dull, sad business life is," he added, wearily; "it is not until everything has gone wrong that we see how easily it might all have been right. And always ourselves to blame, never any one else—only ourselves."

"*I* could be happy enough," said Grace, "if it wasn't for other people's interference;" and she went upstairs to her bedroom.

Twelve o'clock struck, and one—and still Godfrey sat thinking. At half-past one he was roused by a

furious knocking at the hall-door. When he opened it Collingwood rushed in, pale, stricken, and breathless.

"We are too late, Provence," he cried ; "I told you something would happen. He has shot himself. He is dead."

They heard a woman's cry behind them. Grace had seen Collingwood drive up, and had crept to the top of the stairs to hear what was said. When the first shock of his news had passed she came slowly down the staircase, with one trembling hand on the railings, with the other clutching vainly at the wall.

"Did he leave any letter behind him," she said, when she finally reached the hall.

"Not a line," said Collingwood.

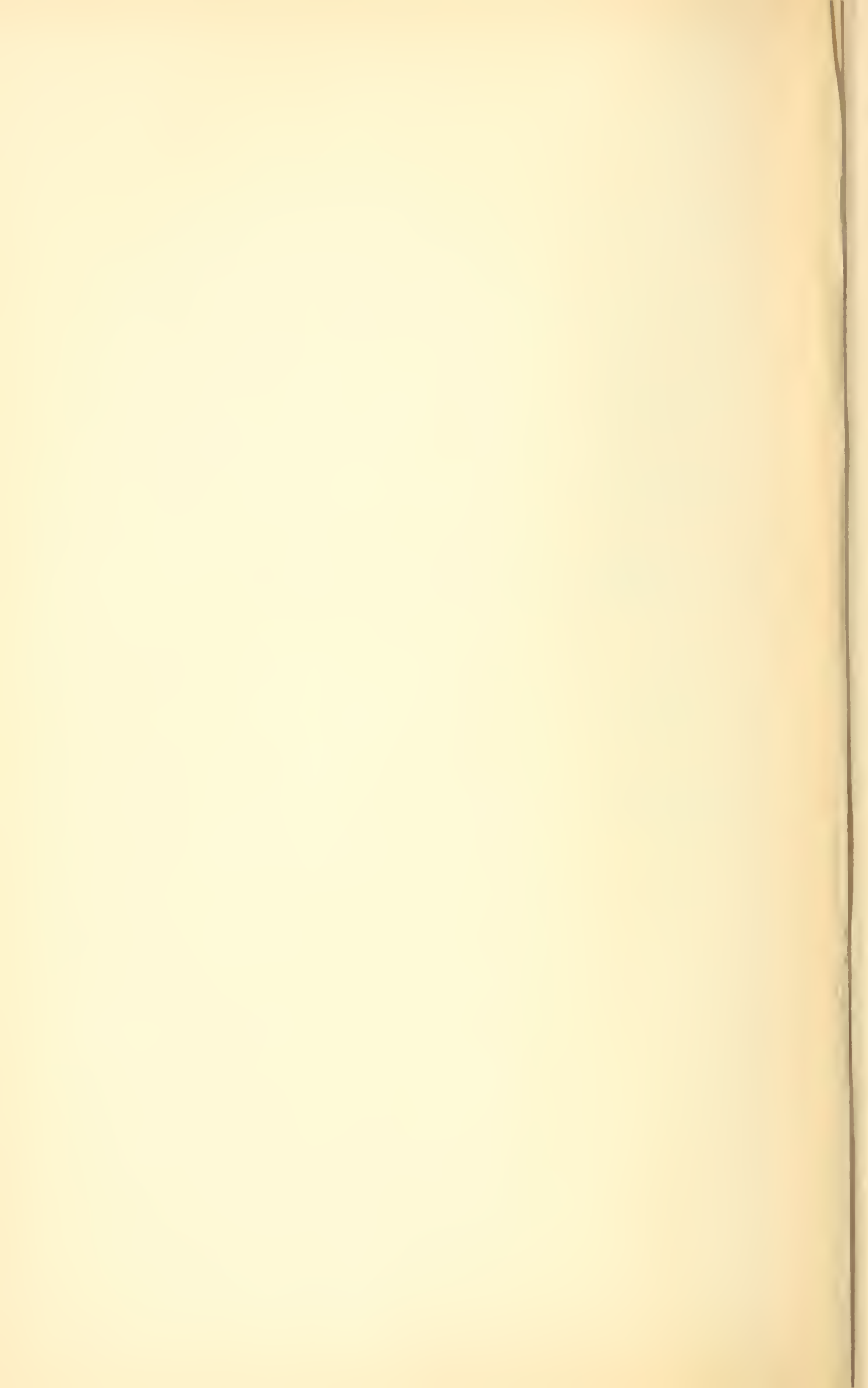
She burst into hysterical tears. "There is nothing to prove, then, that it wasn't an accident ? "

"Nothing," said Collingwood, sternly.

For the first time she turned towards Godfrey. "It—is—too dreadful—to realize—all at once. I—never had strong nerves."

Collingwood left her sobbing on her husband's arm. But the tragedy was in Provence's face, for although he held her he looked away.

THE SINNER'S COMEDY



To

ALFRED GOODWIN

(Formerly Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and late Professor of Greek and Latin at University College, London),

WHO DIED ON

7TH FEBRUARY, 1892.

"He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one,
Exceeding wise. . . .
Lofty and sour to them that lov'd him not;
But to those men that sought him, sweet as summer."

"Whatsoever he said, all men beleeved him that as he spake, so he thought, and whatsoever he did, that he did it with good intent. His manner was, never to wonder at anything; never to be in haste, and yet never slow; nor to be perplexed, or dejected, or at any time unseemely to laugh; nor to be angry, or suspicious, but ever ready to doe good, and to forgive, and to speake truth: and all this, as one that seemed rather of himselfe to have been straight and right, than ever to have been rectified or redressed. . . ."

ANY AUTHOR TO ANY READER.

Reader. But where are the Unities?

Author. In life there are no Unities, but three Incomprehensibles: Destiny, Man, and Woman.

The Sinner's Comedy.

I.

WHEN the ninth Lord Middlehurst lay on his death-bed, he called each of his three children to him in turn. The heir he bade do his duty, and remember that Feudalism under a just lord was the only -Ism for a loyal subject and a patriot.

The second son he implored to give up smoking.

The third child, who was his favourite and a girl, he looked at in silence for a long time. When he spoke, it was in a whisper too low to be heard by the others, who lingered in the room at a distance from the bedside.

"Emily," he said, "all things in life are vanity—save one. That is Love. Find it. It is the philosopher's stone."

He did not speak again till just before he died, when he kissed his wife's hand with singular tenderness and called her "Elizabeth." She had been christened Augusta Frederica; but then, as the doctors explained, dying men often make these mistakes.

The effect produced on each of the three by the good nobleman's last injunctions was curious and significant.

The heir, who would have been very strong-minded

had he been born a woman, had a soul above the management of a country estate. Although all his passions were extremely well-bred and gentlemanly, and had never given him one moment's anxiety from the hour of his birth, there was one—no less gentlemanly, however, than the others—which ruled him with something approaching despotism. This was Ambition. He longed to make a mark, or, to express it more vulgarly, cut a figure. Now, fortunately or unfortunately, the number of figures which can be cut in the world is practically unlimited; the only difficulty is to cut precisely the kind of figure one would wish. But that merely illustrates the playfulness of the gods. The kind of figure Lord Middlehurst liked to imagine himself cutting was dignified, important, and frock-coated. That is to say, he was to be *the* man on all occasions to wear the Frock-coat and represent in one gracious person the literal and symbolic in Frock-coats throughout cultivated Europe.

He scraped together all his available capital, raised his rents, and started a Daily Paper.

The Honourable Robert Haviland, who was the second son, was noted for his serenity. When his brother was oppressed with gloom to think how few people he knew who were sufficiently moral to dine with, Robert reminded him that the most interesting sinners usually preferred a supper. His cheerfulness was indiminishable. He shaved regularly for the week following Lord Middlehurst's death, gave his lounging-coat to an under-groom, and began reading religious novels—in bed—as a first step towards reform. At the end of the tenth day he hinted to the coachman that a rat-hunt might be amusing.

Before a fortnight had passed, he was limiting himself to four pipes a day—with fluctuating success. "A fellow can't break off a habit all at once," he said; "it would play the very devil with his nerves, to begin with!"

Emily, who was eighteen at the time of her father's death, married in the following year, at her mother's suggestion, a Mr. Francis Adolphus Prentice, of the firm of Prentice, Rawncliffe, Prentice and Company, bankers, a gentleman of middle age, for whom she cherished the highest respect and esteem. She had met him at six dinners, two tennis-parties, and a court ball. To a young girl marriage only means a trousseau and a honeymoon; the trousseau she can describe to a flounce: she imagines the honeymoon as a flirtation under the blessing of the Church. Emily, not unmindful of her future husband's brief but destroying small-talk, waived the idea of flirtation, and concentrated her thoughts on the trousseau. Just six months after the wedding, the unfortunate gentleman died of an illness which began with a carbuncle and ended in complications. Emily was shocked at his death, and grieved because she could not grieve. He had been so very kind and so very stupid. She went in mournful weeds, and ordered orchids to be placed on his grave twice a week. Her mother suggested, "At all events, for the *present*."

In stature Mrs. Prentice was rather above the average height. Her symmetry was modern: she was the Venus of the Luxembourg, not the goddess of Milo. Her hair, which was fine and abundant, was of that very light brown which usually accompanies a sallow skin. Emily's complexion was like

porcelain, pink and transparent. Her eyes were blue; they had the fire and brilliancy without the coldness of steel. Her nose and mouth were delicately formed; she had a little square chin, with a cleft which looked like a dimple. All her features suggested decision and force: that the decision would be shown at the right moment, that the force would be well-directed, was less certain. "A fine devil spoilt in a saint," said one man of her. His wife was her dearest friend—so he had a right to his opinion.

But in the county it was whispered that Mrs. Prentice was a flirt; no harm in her, of course (the "Of Course" always), yet still—a flirt. A certain estate, some eight miles away from Hurst Place (where the lady lived for three months of the year with her mother), belonged to a certain baronet, Sir Richard Kilcoursie by name: said Baronet, a bachelor. Would it be human to suppose that the fair Emily's eyes had not rolled Kilcoursie-wards; that, remembering their colour and man's weakness, they had rolled vainly? The county—with marriageable daughters—hoped for the best in the case of the Honourable Mrs. Prentice.

Sir Richard Kilcoursie, of St. Simon's Close, in the county of Mertfordshire, started in life as the younger son of a younger son. Before he was out of his short-clothes, his family decided that he should enter the Civil Service. "Then," said they, "if he only lives to be sixty-three he will have a pension!" When Richard arrived at years of discretion, he saw no reason for quarrelling with their plan. Every day of his life brought him nearer the pension, and every day he had the pleasure of spending it in advance.

When Fate made him a baronet, and dropped the hoard of two respectable bachelors into his pocket, he had something like ruin staring him in the face. He never forgot the vision. It sobered his philosophy. He began to take an interest in the workings of Providence. For the rest, he was a man who found no fault with the facts of life so long as they were expressed in picturesque metaphor. The agreeable system of ethics condensed in the axiom that all vices are but exaggerated virtues, seemed to him to breathe a more benevolent spirit than the "*Imitatio Christi.*" He believed that Man was the measure of all things; that Man was Sir Richard Kilcoursie. His views on woman were, perhaps, more remarkable for their chivalry than their reverence; that she lost her youth was a blot on creation: that she could lose her virtue made life worth living. As his nature was sensuous rather than sensual, however, the refinement of his taste did for him what the fear of God has hardly done for few. He waited for his Eve: she was to be Guinevere, not Molly Seagrim. He met her when he was twenty-three and she nineteen. Her name was Anna Christian: she was studying Art in Jasper Street, Bloomsbury. At seventeen she had married an actor—a gentleman with strong feelings and a limp backbone. He was an unspeakable man; and, having endured all things, she left him. It was a bad beginning, but two years' companionship with the Impossible had taught her to bear the Necessary with patience. She was a woman who perchance could not have learnt that lesson in any other school. "I believe," she told her confessor (she was a Catholic), "I really believe I am almost meek."

The holy man looked a little doubtful. "At any rate," she faltered, "I am meeker than I was." He said nothing, but there was a certain eloquence about his eyebrows which appealed so strongly to her sense of humour that she even woke up in the night to smile over it. "I don't care, I *am* meeker," she murmured, and fell asleep again.

Anna was not born, she was made: she had no inherited prejudices, only a consciousness of privilege: she was used to the wilderness, and snuffed up the wind at her pleasure. The men and women she moved among had no philosophy of the artistic temperament: they were its unconscious *data;* they lived, not as they reasoned, but as they felt. And Feeling with them was no psychological problem; they accepted their moods with their skin as part of the human economy. In their simplicity they were like the philosopher who wrote the whole tragedy of life in the sentence: "*Appetite, with an opinion of attaining, is Hope; the same, without such opinion, is Despair.*" Anna found in Richard Kilcoursie a man who, though not of her world, showed an immense appreciation for it. If he had no Art, he had at least a Temperament. In his enthusiasm, his impulsiveness, and buoyant sense of irresponsibility, he was like the men of her own people; he was only unlike them where the difference seemed, in her eyes, immeasurably to his advantage. He had a grace of manner and bearing common enough, it may be, among well-born Irishmen, but exceedingly rare among the art students, journalists, and actors of Jasper Street, Bloomsbury. Furthermore, he was handsome in the chaste and classic style. In Anna's thoughts he figured chiefly

as a work of art: that was the first impression he left, and the one which remained when all others were dispelled or forgotten. Richard loved her—or thought so; she loved him, and thought nothing at all about it. A little close reasoning would have shown her that it was affection and good-fellowship she bore him, and no more. Marriage—even viewed as an impossibility—or the commoner relation in Jasper Street, never occurred to her. Her experience of the married state had been so terrible that she could not trust herself to remember it; to anticipate even the risk of another such made her pale.

For two years Richard was perfectly happy in her friendship—or, at least, possessed by the excitement which passes so readily for happiness; for one he was contented; at the beginning of the fourth year he came into his title. Then life took at once a wider and a narrower meaning: wider, because his interests covered a larger field, narrower, because his own personality—the figure of Sir Richard Kilcoursie—blocked up the way. Not that his egoism was loud-voiced or swaggering—it was merely constant: if his intellect had possessed an equal stability he would, no doubt, have achieved greatness. As it was, his pleasure-loving mind found satisfaction—if nothing better presented itself—in the unsatisfactory: he endeavoured to elude disappointment with the same persistence as the metaphysician seeks for truth. If his love-bird proved a sparrow, he would discover unimagined charms in the sparrow—not the least of them being that it had been clever enough to deceive him. His companionship with Anna was the one really serious element in his life. Although her

attitude towards the world was one of indifference, it was only because she saved her earnestness for her work ; she lived for it and, as it were, in it. To be in daily association with a woman so determined and so studious, who, though often mistaken in her opinions, had always the courage of them, gave him a wholesome reverence for those who labour to other ends than cakes and ale. She lived very frugally in two little rooms, and supported herself by illustrating : what time she could spare from that, she devoted to practice in oils. Her Masterpiece, as she called it, was only waiting to be painted : it was all in her mind's eye. The pleasures of her life, outside her work, were few and simple : they mostly consisted in going to the theatre, when she had orders, and exploring London. She and Richard would tramp for hours through squares and terraces, crescents, streets, and roads—S.E., S.W., and W., N., and N.W., and N.E. —they were never tired till they reached home, and then there would still be something to talk over, to laugh about and plan for the next day. When the change came in Richard's fortune her tastes remained the same, but, when they went to the theatre, they had a box and a chaperon. In Jasper Street, Bloomsbury, where nature was more in vogue than respectability, a chaperon was considered an unnecessary and tedious addition to the ordinary plagues of life, but Richard explained that Society which bought pictures was very different from Society which painted them : he pointed out, with all possible delicacy, that although she might not care for the whims of the polite world, he, from the habit of his early training, did and must.

"Do you think, then, you have been doing wrong

all this time?" said Anna, quietly; "have we sinned in dining together, and talking together, and walking together?"

"Of course not," said Sir Richard, flushing; "but one has no right to thrust the details of their private life and their most sacred convictions. . . . They wouldn't be understood, to begin with. People would misunderstand us altogether."

"What does that matter so long as we understand ourselves?" said Anna.

"I could not bear to place you in a false position. I have been far too careless of appearances as it is. In that respect I have been abominably selfish."

The subject dropped: they never returned to it again. But Society never heard his most sacred convictions.

If Anna had been true to herself, however, at that crisis she would have passed out of his life for ever and begun the world afresh, unfriended. But while she could face the world, she could not face the loneliness: solitude *à deux* makes solitude only one of two things—perfect rest or complete destruction. In her case she feared it would mean destruction. Richard, with all his shortcomings, had grown, as it were, part of her nature; losing him would mean losing her dearest weakness. She knew, too, that her influence and affection were more to him than all the moon-swearing passion in the world; that if he could or might love a dozen others for their ears or their eyebrows, or their way of eating bread-and-butter, he would always look to her in trouble and perplexity. She would not desert him. Matters were at this stage when Mrs. Prentice came to Hurst Place on a long

visit. Sir Richard then discovered that he was feeling tired of his scheme for happiness. He decided that purity like Anna's appealed to the sentiment of a man, but did not touch his sympathy. Purity itself was too unsympathetic: it had no Past. Anna had a heart, many tender and lovely traits—but she had no passion. He was quite sure she had no passion. It was a pity. Emily Prentice was beautiful; she was young; she was witty; she was a widow—and rich. He fell in love with the Notion of her. About the same time Emily began to wish that he could meet some woman (she was afraid she could not think of *just* the woman) who would lead him into the path of peace. For she had heard rumours of a certain recklessness, of a cynical desperation, of a hey-day philosophy, of a young eagle playing the jackdaw. She felt concerned: she could not sleep for concern. When she happened to meet him on the high-road one morning, she probably blushed for the same reason. He blushed too. Emily said she was quite sure he would be glad to hear that her mother's cold was much better. (The Lady Middlehurst always had a cold when there was nothing more amusing to catch.) He expressed his delight at the tidings. Then, by an odd coincidence, they both began together.

"I think——" said Emily.

"I was wondering——" said Sir Richard.

"I beg your pardon," said she.

"Not at all—I interrupted you."

"I forget what I was going to say."

"So do I."

"Isn't the sky blue?" she said, after a pause; "isn't it beautiful?"

"Very beautiful," said Sir Richard.

"But you are not looking," said Emily, severely.

"I can always see the sky." This was bold. He waited to see the effect.

"Yes, but it isn't always that colour," said Emily, glancing heavenward. For an Angel, it may be, she was a shade subtle.

"Would you be angry if I said something?" said the Mortal.

"How can I tell?" she murmured.

"Do you think I would willingly make you angry?"

"I am sure you wouldn't—willingly. And, in any case, I shouldn't feel anger. I might be hurt, or vexed, or——," she smiled at him with beguiling sweetness, "simply amused."

"It might amuse you, for instance, if I made a fool of myself." Enamoured man is alternately the lover and the turkey-cock.

"Well," said Emily, "after all, you *need* not make a fool of yourself. You are not obliged to amuse me that way, are you?"

"I don't know," he said, impetuously. "I don't know. I only know one thing just at present." He caught her hand. (A country road has its advantages.) "Only one thing, Emily!"

"Oh! . . . That's a stupid thing to know. Forget it!"

"Never."

"Please forget it."

"Never! *never!*"

"But there are other women—much nicer than I am—better worth loving—who would love *you*."

"I don't want any other woman to love me. I only want to love you. May I?"

She looked at him and owned to herself that he was a lover any woman would be proud of. Honest love, or its semblance, will always gain a woman's sympathy even if it fails to win her heart. To Emily, who doubted whether she had a heart to lose, it had the added fascination of mystery. She envied him his gift of loving. Next to it, she thought the gift of surrendering were most to be desired. But she could not make up her mind to surrender. Freedom, too, was not without its sweetness.

"Love is not for me," she said, with a gentle sigh; "don't think of it—don't speak of it. There is nothing in the world for me but to grow old and die. That is my future." She sighed once more and glanced down at her half-mourning—designed by Worth. "Let us talk of something else."

But his blood was up. The ancestral Paddy (on his mother's side) was tugging at his heart-strings. "Why did God put you in the world—if you are not to be loved and worshipped and—oh, Emily!"

She laughed in spite of herself. "I am afraid," she said, "God has something else to think of besides my love-affairs!"

"Emily!"

"Yes, Richard." (He hardly liked the *Richard*—it had a sisterly inflection.)

"When may I see you again? Here are those beastly lodge-gates. I must see you soon. Say to-morrow."

"Well, if you call, you are not to say—the things

you have said to-day. . . . In the first place, they are not true."

He saw his opportunity. "*Not* true that I love you; not true that I would give my life to even kiss your hand" (which he did on the spot, without moving an eyelid; "*not* true that you are the most beautiful——"

"Don't be silly," she said, blushing.

"Do you believe me?"

"I dare say—you think—you are in earnest." She would not say more. He, considering it well afterwards, decided that it was enough. He had some knowledge of the sex.

II.

In a small studio in Chelsea—a studio furnished with severe and comfortless simplicity—a man and a woman were talking. The man was Sir Richard Kilcoursie; the woman was Anna Christian. There was something in her bearing which was even majestic; something in her expression which was childlike and yet not young—a worldly wisdom more elfish than mortal. Her pale, delicate face seemed to peep out from the cloud of black hair which overshadowed her brows and hung in a large knot at her neck. A mouth which seemed too firm to be passionate, and was too pretty to be austere, grey eyes, full of a tenderness which was half mockery, emphasized the contradiction in terms which was the strange characteristic of the whole woman. Sir Richard looked at her furtively, and very often with what was plainly unwilling admiration. He would rather not have admired her that day.

They had been discussing for more than an hour various practical matters relating to his private affairs: the management of his estate, certain poor cousins, the wages he was going to give his new coachman. Every moment he grew more startled at her intimate knowledge of all that concerned him: he realized, with dismay, that there had been, that there was, nothing too trivial or too deep in his life for her regard.

"There is something you want to tell me," she said, suddenly; "what is it?"

He laughed uneasily. "I never can hide anything from you. I suppose—there is—something."

"Tell me then." Her voice was singularly rich and well-modulated.

"Do you remember——" he began, and then stopped.

"Well?"

"Of course you remember that the Middlehursts are my neighbours. Did I ever mention—Mrs. Prentice? She is Lady Middlehurst's daughter."

"I don't think you mentioned her," she said, drily; "the name doesn't sound familiar. *Prentice*, *Prentice*. No, you certainly never told me anything about an old lady named Prentice."

"I wonder whether you would like her; but—she's young."

"Young?" said Anna.

"Well, she's twenty-two, or so."

"I was nineteen when you met me! Is she pretty?"

"In a way, yes. In fact, I suppose—decidedly." He pressed his temples.

"Dark, or fair?"

"Neither one nor the other. There is nothing extreme about her."

"I understand. Tepid! What sort of figure?"

"She is tall and statuesque," said Sir Richard. "I always feel that she ought to have been called Diana. Can you imagine her now?"

The corners of her mouth just curved. "I think I can."

"The fact is—can't you guess?"

"Why should I trouble to make guesses when you

are going to tell me *everything?*" She fixed her eyes upon his; he could not look away.

"It is hard—in so many words," he stammered.

"You are so like a man! . . . I never thought you were chicken-hearted. You did not seem so when I loved you. Perhaps I should say—when you loved *me*."

"I tell you," he said, springing to his feet, "Emily bores me. Do you think I love her? Do you think she is like *you?*" He put his hand with some roughness on her shoulder, and undoubtedly gave her a shake. There was something in his violence, however, which convinced her far more than his protestations that Emily Prentice very possibly did bore him —or would. Her heart softened.

"You never wanted to call *me* Diana," she sighed.

"I shouldn't dream of her," he said, walking up and down the room—"I shouldn't dream of her if it were not for the estate, and all that. I must have an heir. You see, I really owe it to my people. It's only common decency on my part."

"I thought you did not believe in marriage?"

"I didn't at one time. I had no responsibilities then—no means. It was very different. A younger son cannot be expected to believe in anything."

"And is no one expected to believe in a younger son?" It was seldom she was betrayed into bitterness—a fact which most people attributed to her want of feeling.

"I thought you would make a scene. Women are so unreasonable. I have told you that Emily cannot compare with you. What more can I say? Even now," he added, a little unsteadily, "I would let my

family go to the devil if you would give up your extraordinary ideas and——"

"Richard," she said, gravely, "I will forgive what you were going to say."

"If you cared for me you would not think you had anything to forgive," he answered with a harsh laugh. "There is no crime in being Real. But there is so much mawkish, false sentiment about women, that a man is driven to hypocrisy in spite of himself."

"If you want a creature who will love you in your Real moments—if this is one—and in spite of them, you must look for her among the Pollies and Sallies. With them, what they *call* love is the only feeling—they have no others to offend."

Sir Richard looked at her, and wondered. "The truth is," he said, "men can't follow your way of loving. You see, they don't understand it. It's so—so——" he paused for the word—"well, it's so self-possessed."

"When are you going to be married?" she asked, presently.

He felt the awkwardness of the question: Emily had given no promise yet.

"There is nothing definitely arranged—at present."

"Well, I hope you will be happy."

A feeling not wholly unlike disappointment crept over him. For the first time in their history he doubted her love. The thought brought a gnawing loneliness.

"Do you quite understand it all, Anna?"

"Perfectly. She will be the mother of your heir; you will be faithful to her—in your better moments."

He blushed and said, "You know where to stab."

He could not see her ; she touched the back of his coat with the tip of her fingers. That brought her some comfort.

"There is nothing more to be said," he went on.

"Let me see her portrait," said Anna, suddenly.

He pulled a small leather-case out of his breast-pocket.

"How did you know I had it ?" he asked.

"I guessed," she said, with a faint smile ; "you used to carry mine !" She studied the photograph for some minutes and then returned it. "You will be very glad," she said, "to remember me."

He looked at her more than half-credulously. She nodded her head. He laughed and went to kiss her. Anna stepped back : her eyes blazed.

"Never do that again," she said.

A china vase—the one ornament in that bare room—stood near the doorway. Sir Richard lifted his cane and struck it. It fell in a dozen pieces.

"You have no heart," he said, "not an atom. You don't care for me in the least. You never did."

"Yes, I *did*," she answered.

"I will write."

"Yes, write."

"I suppose I must go now."

"Very well." She followed him into the hall. "Richard."

"What ?"

"Say—you don't care a damn !"

His lips moved, but he uttered no word.

And so he left her.

Her life with Sir Richard had been one of self-

abnegation. She had danced to his piping and wept at his mourning : she had been his companion—he had never been hers. At first she had asked nothing better—a peculiarity in woman's love—at first ; but, as time went on, the desire to pipe a note or two and mourn just a sigh or so on her own account was often fierce, not to be subdued, a little desperate. Still, he had been kind to her, and faithful according to his lights. She glanced at her easel, but she was in no mood for work that day. She amused herself looking through an old sketch-book. She found page after page of Richard smoking, Richard sleeping, Richard laughing, Richard scowling, Richard standing, Richard sitting, Richard reading, Richard profile, Richard full-face, Richard three-quarters, Richard back-view. Four of them she rubbed out. She was about to rub out a fifth, when she burst into tears.

III.

Two ladies and two gentlemen were seated in the library of a country-house one afternoon in September. One of the gentlemen wore the gaiters of a Dean. One of the ladies looked as though she would like to wear them, if only for half an hour. As it happened, however, she was dressed in a very tight and evidently very new grey silk, embellished with strings of beads. These jangled and danced with all her movements, to her evident satisfaction and the men's secret despair. She was a small woman and extremely slight, yet, in spite of her slimness, there was not the faintest sign of bone about her; in fact, it was said that the Dean's sister had not a bone in her body. She was composed of flesh, blood, and spirit.

The other lady, Mrs. Digby Vallence, was tall and spare, with a small face, big eyes, and a large mouth. Digby was fond of saying that his wife's face was geometrically impossible. The parts were greater than the whole. She was a very amiable, intelligent woman, who played Schumann with a weak wrist and was noted for her cookery recipes. Her husband would not have given her for a seraglio of houris.

He himself was a man about fifty, with a clean-shaven face and handsome clearly-cut features. The ends of his pale yellow necktie were tied with artistic abandon, his short serge coat was of the finest texture, and his loose trousers, of the same material, hung with

an idea of drapery about his elegant legs. He wore the self-satisfied air of the criticised turned critic ; his general expression conveyed that life was one long struggle with his own fastidiousness—that he practised toleration as the saints did self-denial. Mr. Digby Vallence was a gentleman of some fame, who had translated Theocritus out of honesty into English, discovered a humourist in Jeremy Taylor, damned Rousseau, and, in his leisure, bred canaries. His celebrated paradox, "There is nothing so natural as Art," was perhaps even more famous than he.

"You have never told us," he said, addressing the Dean, "what you think of Mrs. Prentice."

The Dean, who sat in the corner, had a fine, expressive face which suggested his mobile disposition. The type was too unusual to strike a thoughtless observer as anything more than severe ; women, without exception, called him odd-looking, and were silent. He did not appeal to them—to begin with, he betrayed no desire to appeal to them. An unpardonable insult. The melancholy which clouded his countenance was neither gentle nor resigned ; on the contrary, rather fierce and self-mocking. This fierceness was intensified by a pair of heavy eyebrows and very piercing brown eyes. ("One can never lie to Sacheverell with any degree of comfort," said the plaintive Vallence.) He was tall and well-made, although he stooped a little and looked some years older than he really was. In point of fact he was forty. But a man's age depends on his history. His history had been dull, grey, and unromantic—an even saunter into success which only seemed to him a crueller name for failure. "Sacheverell promised to

be brilliant," said his college tutor once, "but I am afraid he is only solid. He will be a rock for other men to sharpen their wits on." To guess a man's fate is comparatively easy: to perceive its necessity, its why and wherefore, is given only to the man himself, and then after much seeking and through a mist.

The Dean's sister, Mrs. Molle, was the widow of an Irish major, who had left her his lame hunter, four very healthy little boys, and a dying command that she should do her duty by the children. Sacheverell awoke one morning to find the pitiful group on his doorstep in St. Thomas's-in-the-Lanes, where he held a small living.

"I knew you would be glad to have us," said Eleanor.

The next day his study was referred to as the drawing-room, and he was moved to the attic away from the children's noise. Eleanor soon complained, however, that the neighbourhood was dull, and the house far too small for comfort. She had no boudoir, and the nursery chimney smoked. She gave his old housekeeper notice, and lectured him on his want of ambition. As a means of advancement she advised that he should get a better living, in a decent neighbourhood; take pupils, and preach Somebody's funeral sermon. "A man is not supposed to keep a family on a Fellowship," she said. He glanced guiltily at his violin; it represented half a year's income.

"*That*," said Eleanor, "will lead to nothing but liver-complaint. Providence sent me to you at the right moment. You do nothing all day but play and dream and scribble. You surely spend a fortune on music-paper. I hope you get it at the Stores?"

He shook his head. There was a small shop near—it was so much more convenient; he could not say what they charged him; it would be on the bill, no doubt, but when he was in a hurry——

"That is not the sort of thing one is ever likely to want in a hurry," said Eleanor; "if you send a post-card to the Stores——"

He was, it may be, a little quick-tempered. "I could never order anything—connected with my work—in the same list with soap and Gregory powder and beef-extract. It may be ridiculous, but that is my feeling. Nothing will change it."

But all this happened when Sacheverell was a young man, as the world counts youth, when his dream was to write Masses on Mount Athos. Now he was a Dean, and visited country-houses. "I have made him what he is," Mrs. Molle told her friends; "no wife could have done more for him!"

Men heap together the mistakes of their lives and create a monster which they call Destiny. Some take a mournful joy in contemplating the ugliness of the idol. These are called Stoics. Others build it a temple like Solomon's, and worship the temple. These are called Epicureans. The Dean of Tenchester was a Stoic.

"You have never told us," repeated Vallence, "what you think of Mrs. Prentice."

"I suppose," said Sacheverell, "she would be called pretty."

"I have seen her look pretty sometimes," said his sister, at once. "She varies very much. Her hats don't always suit her."

He tried to feel that this was not disturbing.

"Well," said Vallence, leaning back in his chair, with his eyes scanning, as it were, the hidden truths of criticism, "she is not, properly speaking, a pretty woman at all. She is a Manner. To call such a work of exquisite cunning pretty, or even beautiful, is only an attempt at appreciation."

"She is very subtle," said his wife.

"Next time I see her I will look at her more carefully," said Mrs. Molle. She paused, and then asked very suddenly, "Do you think she will ever marry Sir Richard Kilcoursie?"

"She likes Kilcoursie, no doubt," said Vallence. "He is certainly *amouraché*, and she accepts the situation. I don't suppose he wants her to do more. It is only a very unselfish man who cares to be loved; the majority prefer to love—it lays them under fewer obligations."

"Do you think they would ever be happy together?" said Sacheverell, slowly.

Vallence shrugged his shoulders. "She must be disappointed in *some* man. To see men as they are not and never could be, is the peculiar privilege of the feminine nature. You see," he went on, "love comes to man through his senses—to woman through her imagination. I might even say, taking the subject on broad lines, that women love men for their virtue; while men, very often, love women for the absence of it."

"A woman would no doubt need a great deal of imagination to love a man for his virtue," said Carlotta, meekly.

But Vallence was lost in meditation. He had con-

ceived a magazine article to be called "The Pleasing of a Lute," and beginning thus: *The poet in his artificial passion expresses what man feels naturally and needs all his reason to repress. . . .*

"I have heard, as one does hear such things," said Mrs. Molle, "that Sir Richard almost married an actress."

"I think she was an artist," said Carlotta; "but pray never speak of it before Emily."

The actress who might have been an artist was grateful to Sacheverell's fancy. He had a fine Bohemian instinct. "Indeed," he said, and looked at Vallence.

"Ah," said that gentleman, ever ready to discuss one friend with another—in fact, it was chiefly for this pleasure that he made them—"ah, a curious affair altogether. But it merely illustrates the great law of infidelity in human nature. A man *must* be faithless to something—either to a woman, or his God, or his firmest belief. Kilcoursie certainly appeared very devoted to the other lady—whoever she was. I have heard from several people that they were always together at one time. No one knows her name. They tell me that she looks like Vittoria Colonna."

"Dear me," said Eleanor, thinking that she must hunt out Vittoria in the Classical Dictionary.

Sacheverell strolled to the window. "It has stopped raining," he said. "I think I will go out."

Once in the open air, he threw back his head very much like a dog let loose from his chain. He almost wondered how he had escaped from that close room, the clatter of the teacups, the worse clatter of tongues.

As a rule, he fell a too ready victim to circumstances: he helped to build the altar for his own sacrifice. To-day, however, he felt rebellious; he was getting tired; Eleanor had disappointed him. When a man gets an idea into his head about a woman, either to her glory or her damnation, whatever she may say or do only gives him one more reason for sticking to it. It is only when he gets an equally strong idea about some other subject, or some other woman, that he becomes nicely critical. Eleanor's virtues had always seemed to him unique; her faults, numerous certainly, were only those of the Universal (preferably, the Homeric) Woman. That afternoon her judgment had been very shallow; she had shown an incapacity to look higher than millinery. It was vexatious.

He remembered his first meeting with Mrs. Prentice. It was the day after his arrival at the Vallences'; she had called in the afternoon on her dear Carlotta: he had told himself he was interested, choosing that word because he knew no other, for no man knows his language till he has lived it. The possibility of feeling more than an interest in any woman had never entered his head. He had always kept Passion well within covers on his bookshelf. Emily had talked, with a pretty affectation of learning (feeling, no doubt, that a Dean would look for something of the sort), of Heine, and a new poet, and Palestrina; he had noticed the length of her eyelashes, and her beautiful unmusicianly hands; hummed, when she had gone, *My love is like a melody*, and reflected, having dined indifferently, that some women were like melodies. The indefinite "*some women*" is an inspiration which comes to every man in his hour

of peril. From which it would seem that men and Deans have very much in common. . . . Their second meeting, too, three days later, when she called again, and was pleased to admire his drawings (in the style of Dürer) illustrative of certain passages in Lucretius. He hastened to explain, however, that the philosophy of that poet was unconvincing. "What *is* his philosophy?" said Emily. . . . Then, when he had dined at Hurst Place, how they had disagreed on several points, misunderstood each other with a certain deliberateness, said good-bye coldly. How, the next morning, feeling restless, he had walked on the high-road for no other reason than because it was dusty, unpicturesque, and apparently leading no-whither—suggestive to the Thinking Mind of man's existence; how *She* had driven past with her mother, bedecked and smiling, disquieting alike to metaphysic and the sober contemplation of telegraph poles. Then at the Tableaux in aid of the New Hospital, when Emily as "Vivien"—under lime-light—had gazed with real sisterly affection on the round and impassive countenance of the Honourable Robert as "Merlin." Sacheverell had felt with some impatience the incompatibility of such trifling with a true appreciation of the seriousness of life; it showed him that Emily was frivolous, also that her hair fell below her waist. Both discoveries were soul-plaguing: the first because it jarred so horribly, the second because he shared it with assembled Mertfordshire. After the performance he had been the last to come forward: the only one who did not offer some tribute (more or less disguised) to her beauty. "I am afraid," she had said, when she

wished him good-night, "*you don't care for Tennyson!*" He made a note in his pocket-book to the following effect: *No man can attain the sublimity of the feminine egoist.* Frivolity! Egoism! what were such abstracts weighed against that most sweet and tangible Feminine. To have discovered that some woman was Feminine was better than chasing the Absolute through the Libraries of Europe. It was, however, but a momentary rebellion against the ruling Uncertainty of his life. He had dedicated his days (he lived, from his own point of view, for two hours every morning before breakfast, and Eleanor) to the pursuit of the Absolute. His work when finished was to be called "The Metaphysic of Religion": every one said it would make him a bishop. Should he question the glory of the Unseen because one fair woman was in sight? Bitter self-reproach followed his brief moment of exultation.

"All is vanity," he sighed at last, and "discovering it—the greatest vanity." In this frame of mind he looked up, and saw he was near the church. The door was half-open: he heard the organ and recognized the touch. It belonged to no master-hand: and lacked everything that makes a touch—save audacity. He smiled at the childishness of the performance, which was too unaffectedly bad to offend his artistic taste. He pushed open the door and looked in. The player was Emily. She wore a scarlet gown fantastically embroidered in blue and gold; the light from the flaring gas-jet played on her hair and caught the diamonds on her fingers. In the dark, empty church, she looked to him like some evil spirit risen for his destruction. An evil

spirit! Emily playing "Cujus Animam," with variations.

Sacheverell closed the door softly—she never heard him—and hurried away.

IV.

All the tenants of Avenue Villas, Clapham, kept a servant; most of them were on visiting terms with the curate's wife: here and there one had been known to dine at the Vicarage; one widow, who lived at the corner, had some rich relations who occasionally called on her in a carriage and pair. She was a Baptist, however, and the curate's wife did not even know her name. She fancied it was Grimmage. Mrs. Grimmage, notwithstanding, was a worthy person, and she had a permanent boarder whom the whole of Avenue Villas held in very just esteem. This boarder was a Mr. Cunningham Legge.

By profession Mr. Legge was a humourist: he also wrote the obituaries in *The Argus* (Lord Middlehurst's daily paper): he devilled for one or two scholarly authors (being great in grammar and punctuation): he was taster to a poor but eminently respectable firm of publishers: he had written a volume of very graceful Essays himself: "*To the Night-winds and the Moon.*" One critic wrote of them that their style reminded him of Ruskin, the Letters of Cicero and Charles Dickens.

It was generally known that Cunningham was the son of a clergyman, a fact which, apart from his genius and his literary calling, sufficiently explained his poverty; that his wife had died a few years after their

marriage; that he had never been the same man since; that he worked from morning till night; that no one had ever heard him complain. To look at he was pale, and, to the unseeing eye, insignificant; a man who could sit for hours anywhere and in any company unobserved and silent—indeed, his silence at all times was tragic. To a woman like Mrs. Grimmage it was even awful and mysterious; she tried to understand him, but could not. He was too dim; he seemed already in the land of shadows.

His two little girls he kept at a school in the country; he had no friends who called to see him—if he had any, he saw them in town: the only creature who ventured to Avenue Villas was, oddly enough, a young and beautiful woman. She was his niece, and Mrs. Grimmage knew her as "Mrs. Christian." She had heard Legge address her as "Anna." But she came very seldom, and he never referred to her. Months would pass, when the good Grimmage could only wonder whether she were dead or gone abroad.

"Mr. Legge," she found courage to say to him one day, "is Mrs. Christian a widow?"

"No," he said, quietly.

Mrs. Grimmage had just nursed him through a very sharp attack of bronchitis; she felt she might safely venture on a little light conversation.

"She don't favour you, sir."

"She is my wife's niece."

"Is she anything like her?"

"No," he said; "my wife was beautiful—I cannot tell you how beautiful." For the lover there is only one glory. He paused and sighed; his eyes seemed to pierce into another world.

"Fancy!" said Mrs. Grimmage, "only fancy! Was she very nice?"

"Nice? Dear God! Where did you learn that word? Nice!" He threw back his head and laughed. But only for a moment. The old dumbness once more took possession of him; he went silently out of the room and shut himself in his study. Mrs. Grimmage, who peeped in a little later as much from nervousness as curiosity, found him hard at work on his humorous sketch for *The Gossip*.

He had written for more than three hours when he was roused by a sharp tap at the door. He opened it, and Anna, paler and graver than her wont, stood before him.

"Are you busy?" she said. "Shall I disturb you?"

"I am glad you have come," he said, "I was wondering what had become of you."

She sat down, took off her hat and loosened her cloak. "Now I am here I am afraid you will find me very dull. I have been working rather hard lately. I have also been disappointed in one or two things. Not that I should mind disappointment—now.

Legge glanced at his bookshelves. "Stick to the Immortals," he said, "*they* will never disappoint you. And they are always there—when you want them."

"Ah," said Anna, "but unfortunately before we can love the Immortals and understand them, we must have some experience of the Mortal."

He sighed, and made no answer.

"Have you any news?" said Anna. "How are the children?"

"They are well. They write me very happy letters. Mary has the French prize and Laura has smashed the schoolroom window. They both want new hats."

"Let me choose them," she said; "they would like them much better if they came from London. Children have a great idea of style." She began to laugh—not hysterically, but without mirth. "Richard is going to be married," she said.

Legge's pale face burned with sympathy. He was not altogether surprised at the news—like most people of melancholic temper, he had a quick insight into human nature. He had known from the commencement that Kilcoursie's marriage, with some other woman, would be only a question of time. Anna was bearing it better than he had hoped: her lips quivered and she bit them. In that one movement he saw the whole struggle.

"When did you hear it?" he said, after a long, a painful pause.

"Four days ago. He told me—himself."

"I am afraid it was the only end possible," he said, gently.

"I suppose so."

"Were you—very much—astonished?"

"A little."

"Will it make a great difference in your life?"

"I miss him," she said. For one moment her eyes shone—for even tears have a brief brilliancy, a youth—and then their light was quenched. "It is hard to have no one to talk to. Do you think it will take very long to get used to this—silence?"

"Not long," said Legge: "you will be surprised

to find how soon—how very soon you will care for nothing else."

"He was all—I had in the world," said Anna, "the one creature who seemed to love me. I am not going to cry. Tears mean very little. I have cried. But that's nothing."

"Nothing," said Legge, staring into the fire, "nothing."

"This is my birthday," said Anna. "I am twenty-three. I feel very old, much older than you, really, and I—I do feel so tired. I am afraid I have been overworking."

"Work is good," murmured Legge, "the only good—except Hope. I have lots of Hope."

"Oh, yes," said Anna, "there is Hope." She looked hopeless.

"I have been harder hit than you," said Legge. "I died twelve years ago; the only thing about me that lives is my stomach. I remember they fed it with chops—on the day *She* was buried. Life is certainly humorous."

They were both laughing when Mrs. Grimmage came in with the tea. She wanted to know whether they preferred scones or muffins.

V.

"You must have loved somebody else once?"

"Never. In the first place, it is impossible to really love—more than once."

"To *really* love, perhaps—but men have fancies!"

It was in the music-room at the Vallences'. Emily was taking off her gloves. Sir Richard was watching her. They had both called on Carlotta by appointment to discuss a forthcoming bazaar: Carlotta, with a magnificent instinct, was detained at the Vicarage. The gentle Digby was engaged in his study reviving an old dramatist. He could not be disturbed.

"*Men have died and worms have eaten them*," said Sir Richard; "these things will happen."

"Then you *have* had fancies," she said, with just a note of disappointment in her voice (she, too, had a mind for Exceptions)—"was it very long ago?"

For one brief, too brief moment, he felt tempted to tell her the truth. She was a woman who could hear the truth, and even speak it. It never affected her disagreeably in either case. He thought he might hint something of a youthful madness, and Emily, true to her sex, would no doubt forgive it all with divine generosity, and hate the woman at the bottom of it like the devil.

"I have never had any fancies," he said, at last, and (theoretically) tore up Anna's last note, at that

moment in his pocket. But even this did not make her easier to forget.

Emily sighed contentedly. He was reinstated as the Exceptional Man.

"I think that is very nice of you," she said, frankly. "I didn't really, in my heart, believe that you had. I was almost afraid—you are so dreadfully honest—that you were going to confess to—perhaps *one*."

"What do you think of the Dean?" said Richard, after a pause.

"I don't think he was born to preach to people who want their Heaven to be full of Mansions."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. It was not a spontaneous criticism. I thought him out this morning when Hawkins was doing my hair. I always reserve that half-hour of the day for sober reflection." She blushed. "I suppose you think I am very frivolous. Women have to be; no one will take them seriously—not even other women. It is very hard. But what was I saying about the Dean? Oh—well, there isn't an ounce of Dean about him. He's much too natural."

"What an extraordinary idea! Don't be angry, but I'm afraid you are not a good judge of character." He coloured as he said it. He had too excellent reasons for doubting her discernment. "I never saw any one so stern and unbending as Sacheverell in my life."

"That sternness is merely self-restraint," said Emily; "how much self-restraint do you think the Dean uses to endure Mrs. Molle?"

"I should say she managed him very well."

"How little men understand each other," said Emily, "how very little. Mrs. Molle is helpless and unhelpful. I shall never forget his expression when Mr. Vallence quoted one day, '*It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman in a wide house.*' And she," added Emily, "she is so unconscious. She thinks she governs him completely."

"How intolerable! I should hate to think I was being governed. I would do anything for—the woman I loved." (This he said softly, and uttered the word "woman" as though it were something too sacred for his lips—a piece of subtle flattery by no means lost on the sensitive being by his side.) "I would do anything," he repeated, "but it would be knowingly and for love."

"The secret of managing a man," said the Guileless One, "is to let him have his way in little things. He will change his plan of life when he won't change his bootmaker!"

"How much you know!"

"Don't I?"

He picked up the tassel of her girdle. "That is very pretty," he said; "those little stones——"

He walked away from her and began to pace the floor. "How long is this to go on?" he said. "What is the limit to a man's patience?"

"What do you mean?" said Emily. "What are you talking about?"

"I mean—what are we waiting for?"

"I suppose," said Emily, "we are waiting for Carlotta—and tea." Women have boundless faith in the

sobering effect of commonplace. It is the remedy they administer to disordered passions.

Sir Richard looked at her with something like anger. "This is not a subject which can be changed *that* way. I must speak. I should despise myself if I did not. Do you care--a rap for me?"

"Yes," said Emily, at once, "I like you very much. I think you have a great deal in you. But I want you to use your talents. I suppose I am ambitious for you. A woman likes a man to be her master. That's a secret. I want you to be what people say you could be—if you chose. I hate an idler."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Be of some service to your country. Be a serious politician."

He could not help smiling. "What! make speeches and all that sort of thing?"

"If necessary—yes."

"Are you in earnest?"

"In earnest!" said Emily. "If I could only tell you a tenth part of all I would have you do! But I cannot. Some thoughts belong to a language we can't speak." She was wishing that his eyes were dark and earnest—like Sacheverell's: that his face had the nobility of Sacheverell's—that he *was* Sacheverell.

"Don't dream about me, Emily," said Sir Richard; "that sort of ambition is called dreaming. I shall only grieve you when you wake up. I live to amuse myself. I think life is the most lively thing going. I want to enjoy every hour of it. But I must enjoy it my way. And it is such a different way from yours—so very, very different. If you care for me ever so little, let it be for me as I am. I should

always be jealous of the imaginary me. I would know I was only his shadow."

"I do—like you as you are," murmured Emily. "I am sure I am not mistaken."

"Do you like me well enough to be my wife?"

"I don't know—I—you see—I—don't want to be anybody's wife—just yet."

"I will wait—I will wait as long as you wish. I only want to know that some day——"

Some day sounded a lifetime distant. "Who knows—what might happen—some day?" she said.

He drew a long breath. "Will you promise?"

To promise that something would happen some day seemed even childish in its simplicity. "If you like," she said, half-laughing.

"My love for you," he said, "is a power outside myself. I cannot control it—*it* controls me. It is for you to decide whether for good or evil." Dimly it occurred to him that he had said something of the kind once before—to Anna. "I will try to be worthy of you," he added. She was a very pretty woman. He stooped and kissed her hand.

Just then Sacheverell entered the room.

"They told me you were here," he said; "I have come to say good-bye. I have just received a telegram which calls me back to town. I must catch the 5.40."

He looked so unlike himself that Emily faltered, "I hope it is not bad news?"

"A very old friend is dying," he said; "he has sent for me. That is all."

"I am sorry," said Emily.

"If he lived it would be sadder."

"How is that?" said Sir Richard, who was admiring Emily's mouth.

"Because," said Sacheverell, sternly, "his life has been all work and suffering."

"I am sorry," murmured Emily again.

"Do not pity him. He has chosen the good part. Good-bye." He shook hands with them both and went out.

"He is very depressing," said Sir Richard, after a pause. Emily did not hear. She was listening to the echo of Sacheverell's footsteps as it grew fainter and finally ceased.

"I believe you rather like him," said Sir Richard, jealously.

"He was interesting. He has made me forget three headaches!"

"Yes? A man may give his whole life to a woman, and it won't mean so much to her as if he had once jawed her out of neuralgia!"

"And a woman," said Emily, "may give her soul for a man, and he won't think so much of her as if—she had jilted him for somebody else."

Sir Richard laughed. "We must not take human nature too seriously! That is the mistake which lies at the root of all the misery and discontent in the world!"

Then Carlotta came in—apologetic but smiling.

VI.

"WHAT is the time, Anna?"

"It is past eleven, uncle. He will not come now. You must wait till morning. Besides, there is no hurry. Won't you try and go to sleep?"

"He said he would come, and he will be here. He always keeps his word. Put the clock where I can see it, dear, and go to bed. If I want anything, I will ring."

"I am not tired enough—to go to bed," said Anna, whose eyes were heavy with watching. "Let me read you to sleep. If Dean Sacheverell comes, I can wake you."

Legge had been ill for nearly a fortnight. They said he had not rested sufficiently after his attack of bronchitis; he had tried his strength too soon: they called his condition a relapse. He knew it was the end, because he felt so happy. "To see you lying in bed and not fretting and grizzling over it, is a perfeck treat!" said Mrs. Grimmage.

"I have no book to finish this time," he said, smiling; "*that* is all done."

When he told them—for Anna, too, had come to nurse him—that he wished to see a friend, it was regarded as a hopeful sign. There was a touch of the usual and human in the desire which cheered the soul of Sarah Grimmage. "He only wants livening up, bless you!" she said to the doctor.

Anna fell asleep in her chair while Legge watched the clock. At a quarter to twelve Sacheverell arrived.

"I suppose," he said, "you had given me up?"

"No," said Legge, "I knew you would come."

Sacheverell just noticed that a pale woman with grey eyes murmured something to the sick man, and left the room. In some way she seemed a remarkable woman—quite unlike any other woman he had ever seen. As he looked at her, it seemed like reading an unfinished tragedy—with the catastrophe to be written. When she had gone, Legge turned to him and sighed.

"That is my Dearest's niece," he said, "the one whose mother—had a history—you remember. I should feel so glad—if it were not for her. I am not much to her, but when I am gone she will have no one. She has had a terrible life. I wanted to tell you some of it—I am afraid I'm hardly strong enough—to-night." He spoke with great difficulty, and between long pauses. "A brave woman—and good. Strange—you were stopping—with the Vallences. Never mention—Kilcoursie—if you met him. I don't seem able—to say much—now you have come . . . a lot of things—good of you to come. I shall not forget. . . . I knew you would. The children——" He closed his eyes, but said presently: "I have been waiting to see my Dearest—so long. She will think I have changed." A faint smile moved his lips. "I am rather sleepy. You don't mind?"

Sacheverell sat down by his side and waited.

Mrs. Grimmage and Anna, in the meantime, were talking with some show of blithesomeness in the next room.

"If you want to know my idea of a Man," said Mrs. Grimmage, "the Dean is my idea to the very life. The moment I clapped eyes on him, I said to myself, 'That is a Man'—and meant it. I suppose he's married. He's got a sort of patient, bearing-up look. Perhaps she's a currick's daughter, and a fright. Men are wonderful poor judges of looks. They will pick out girls that you and I wouldn't look at a second time, and go raving cracked after 'em. I know 'em. You can't tell me anything about Men. But I like a man to be manly. Let him be decent, I say, but let him be a Man." She looked wise over this dark utterance.

"A man's way of loving is so different from a woman's," sighed Anna.

"There ain't nothing," said Mrs. Grimmage, "there ain't nothing that makes them so sulky and turns them against you so soon as saying anything like that. And that's a mistake girls always make. They begin the heavenly. It's not a bit of use being heavenly with men. Just you remember that. You must take 'em as they are, or leave 'em."

"I see," said Anna.

"There's many a young woman lost a man's love," observed Mrs. Grimmage, "by coming the heavenly."

"She's better without it," said Anna, "much better."

"The most faithfullest man I ever see," said Mrs. Grimmage, "is your poor dear uncle. But then he's eccentrick—ain't he? And he ain't the sort as many 'ud fancy for a sweetheart. He ain't dash-ey enough. Women do like a bit of Dash. I do myself."

At that moment Sacheverell tapped at the door. The room adjoined Legge's.

"It is over," he said, gently.

Mrs. Grimmage entered a cry. "Oh, sir, what do you mean? Whatever do you mean?"

Anna put her hand to her heart. She followed Sacheverell to the bed where Legge was at rest.

"How happy he looks," she said.

"I never know'd he was so handsome," sobbed Mrs. Grimmage.

He had the face his wife knew, and was young again.

The settlement of poor Legge's affairs proved a very small matter. Beyond his few books and pictures and a little plain furniture he had nothing in the world. He had always spent his money as he earned it: sometimes he could have spent rather more than he earned, and still lacked much which many men would have considered necessary to existence. His two little girls whom he kept at a happier and more cheerful home in the country than he could give them in his lodgings, had all his income save the two pounds a week he kept —unwillingly—for his own use. He never allowed himself to think how he longed for his children and the brightness they might have brought into his life. He only thought of what was best for them. They were left totally unprovided for: the sale of his effects produced, as Sacheverell told Anna, two hundred pounds. As he was the purchaser, he probably knew. Lord Middlehurst, out of consideration for his services to *The Argus*, paid his funeral expenses and the doctor's bill; he also gave him a short obituary, in which he referred

very handsomely to his brilliant talent and excessive modesty, "*which alone kept him from that high place in the public regard*," &c., &c., &c.

"I will take care of the children," said Anna.

"You?" said Sacheverell. She seemed so very young for the burden. But she smiled.

"I am getting on pretty well, you know," she said. "I am more fortunate in my publishers than my poor uncle. I—I draw a little."

Her white face—her slight form—it was all so childish and pathetic. "The artistic profession is the hardest in the world for a woman—in fact, any artistic profession is hard for anybody," he said. "Art means labour—hard, ceaseless, unsatisfying labour. Her service is work, and her reward—the strength for more work."

"I have drawn ever since I can remember," said Anna; "it came to me like speaking. When I was old enough I studied hard. I made up my mind that painting was to be my work in life. *'Tis no sin, you know, to follow one's vocation.* They called me a fool, and they said I would starve. I did starve for a time. I could wish I had starved a little longer. But I married. I forgot my work." She coloured. "I soon remembered it again. I decided to study quietly by myself for a year or two—any number of years, for that matter—I did not care how many, so long as I could see hope at the end. I was working when—when I came to nurse my uncle. I think I must win—perhaps not yet, but some day. Every failure will only make me stronger when I succeed. I am so hard to discourage! Pain and despair and heartache—they cast you down for a while, but afterwards—they

help you to understand." It did not seem at all strange then that she talked to him so openly, but it was very wonderful to remember in later days.

Sacheverell listened with almost painful interest. Her story with its suggestion of a tragedy in little was sad enough; what he feared was her mistaken confidence in her own ability seemed to him even sadder. Genius is so rare, and ambition is so common.

"I should like to see some of your work," he said, at last.

"If you can call at my studio to-morrow," said Anna, laughing, "I will show you my masterpiece!"

He did not go immediately, however, but stayed an hour longer. They sat in the window of Mrs. Grimmage's drawing-room, and talked very happily, if inconsequently, on many subjects, from Browning and Bach to Mazzini and Plato. They were very cultured, indeed.

"Did you see that woman who passed just now?" said Anna, suddenly.

"Yes."

"She had beautiful hair—Venetian red."

"I saw it."

She looked at him with something like gratitude. The artistic sympathy is very subtle—terribly irresistible. "How lovely," she said, "to be with somebody who *does* see things. I could tell you the whole history of that woman," she went on, "just from her walk. She does not care for that tramp—he doesn't understand her—he doesn't even know that her hair is magnificent. But she wants to Belong to somebody."

"When a man suspects that his God is not taking him seriously, he changes his religion," said Sacheverell; "are women less philosophical?"

"Gods are so scarce," sighed Anna; "if a woman finds even a false one—she thinks herself fortunate."

For the next twenty minutes they played at disagreeing. Such flat disagreement was never heard within those peaceful walls. "I shall have more to say on the subject to-morrow," said Sacheverell, when he left.

"I could say miles at this minute," said Anna.

After he had gone she drew him, from memory. The result was such a miserable failure in her eyes that she burnt it—with a refinement of cruelty—by inches. Nor did she ever attempt to draw him again. It may be that a suggestion, a hint of him, cropped out occasionally in the turn of a head, in an arm, or in a look round the brows, but that was all. She kept the Man to herself: he could not be chopped into illustrations.

Sacheverell had guessed from Legge's remark that Anna was none other than the mysterious artist who looked like Vittoria Colonna. It was strange that he should have met her—very strange. Having met her, he was quite certain that the love had been all on Sir Richard's side: that the story was all on Sir Richard's side. That such a woman could care for such a man was impossible. It was easy to understand, however, why Mrs. Prentice might care for him. He had given very little thought to Emily since the evening she had played in the church. He remembered her as one remembers some certain night

in June—that it was perfect for June—that a year of such would be unhealthy. He had mistaken *la grande passion* for passion. It consoled him to call to mind that Marcus Aurelius had also fallen into some fits of love, "but was soon cured." Emily's face came upon him—it was less lovely than Anna's, more bewitching, more human, less spiritual. He thought he had read her character very truly at first sight. She was Circe. Reconsidering his decision, however, at a distance of four weeks and sixty miles, he saw that there were weak points in the Circe theory. Emily was the Popian—merely Popian—coquette: perhaps too fond of admiration: decidedly weak. Pretty? yes, if one admired the opal—set in brilliants. Her hair always smelt of violets. (Scent got into one's brains.) There was none of that mincing sensuality about Anna.

When he saw her at her studio the next day, she was very quiet and grave. The only canvas in the room had its face to the wall.

"I am very nervous about showing it to you," she said; "no one else has seen it. I am so afraid you will think it is rubbish. If you do," she added, "I shall cut it up—and start afresh."

"Even if I think," he said, awkwardly, "that you have hardly had experience enough yet—you see, you are very young——"

He felt he could never flatter her—never pay her mere formal compliments. If her work were bad, he would have to say so.

She went slowly towards the canvas. He was anxious himself, and could not understand the anxiety. It was a new sensation. He dreaded to see her failure; the suspense was intolerable.

"Is the light good?" he began.

"Excellent," said Anna. Neither of them knew what they were saying. "There," she said, placing the picture on the easel. "The subject is 'The Flight of Pompilia.'" She quoted Browning's lines very softly—half-unconsciously:—

> "Between midnight and morn
>
> . . . . .
>
> Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
> Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
> Till it was she; there did Pompilia come;
> The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
> Certainly, for the body was one black,
> Black from head down to foot."

"You were right to work," he said, at last.

"Shall I go on—working?"

"By all means."

"That is all I want to know," said Anna.

"There are many things I should like to say," said Sacheverell, "You have great power. . . . You know what I think—what I *must* think."

She blushed and smiled.

"I have worked very hard," she said. "If you could see the yards of canvas I have burnt! I have been painting and burning ever since I was six. . . . So you like it? Of course, it is not quite finished. I work very slowly. Lately I have accomplished so little—so very little. The illustrations take all my time, and when they are done I am too tired to paint."

"Then why don't you give up the illustrating?"

She smiled at him sadly. "I must keep body and soul together, and—I have some one dependent on

me." This was the first reference she had ever made to her husband. Sacheverell felt at once, by a sort of intuition, that the some one else was the always-absent, always-present Christian. "I made one great mistake in my life," she said, gravely. "Some day I may tell you about it." Then they talked of other things.

"I know—about your book," said Anna, at last: "my uncle told me. Why won't you finish it?"

"That is nothing in the world," he said, briefly. "Why did Legge tell you?"

"One day, when he was ill, I went to his desk—I was the only one he allowed to touch his papers—and I found a manuscript. I was unhappy at the time, but I read it, and somehow, my despair went away. I felt I might yet do something with my life. I asked who wrote it. Then he told me it was yours, that it belonged to your book, and how you put it aside when your sister—when you became a rector—somewhere."

"You see," he said, with an attempt at a laugh, "I, too, have some one dependent on me, and I—like you—work slowly. Still, as a matter of fact I write now, when I feel in the mood. I have a certain amount of leisure. Just now I am supposed to be resting. I have had rather a hard year, but next year may not bring so much care, and then——"

"But—you are not happy," she said.

"Perhaps not. I don't think that matters. I will finish my work some day. I shall finish it for you."

"Promise me," said Anna.

"I promise."

She held out her hand to say good-bye.

"Not that hand," he said, "the other. You give your right hand to every one."

The extraordinary thing was that this did not seem extraordinary to either of them. They had seen a great deal of each other—though the length of their friendship could be reckoned by days.

VII.

That night, Sacheverell received a letter from his sister.

"My dear Peter," it ran—"As it is so much more agreeable here than it is in town or at home just at present, Carlotta *insists* on my remaining another fortnight. I think this is a splendid opportunity to have the dining-room whitewashed and the drawing-room papered. The paint in my bedroom, too, would be none the worse for a fresh coat. As you are in town, perhaps you had better go straight on to Tenchester and remain there to look after the workmen. They need *incessant* watching. Get somebody to inspect the drains. I am so dreadfully afraid of typhoid—one hears such awful things—and now Frank is coming home I want to be *quite* sure that the house is healthy. I have been thinking that *you* might as well move into the back bedroom and let him have yours. There is such a nice wall there to hang his trophies on. We shall never get them all into the drawing-room. Would you like the smaller lion's skin for your study? It is so dark there that no one will be able to see that it is torn.

"Mrs. Prentice is flirting desperately with Sir Richard. She will, no doubt, marry him. They are pretty certain to ask us to St. Simon's-in-the-Close. She and I have seen a great deal of each other

lately. All the Havilands are useful people to know. Lord Middlehurst has a *tremendous* lot of influence. He might do something for one of the boys. I want Lionel to get a secretaryship; he has his father's charm of manner. Darling Percy! But it does not do to think of him. By the bye, don't forget to have all the lamps *thoroughly* overhauled.

"Can you make up a parcel of your old clothes (*under*-things, of course) and send them to me here? I have promised them to the under-gardener. He is so grateful to me, poor creature. I am sure the little change down here did you good. You don't rest sufficiently. I *cannot* get you to be idle. Why you should take all this trouble about that extraordinary Cunningham Legge I cannot imagine. Such waste of time, too, for a man with your responsibilities. Your friends (particularly the *nobodies* and those who have *nothing on earth* to do) seem to think that *you* have nothing to do but to fetch and carry for them. I wonder why you put up with it. *I* would not for one moment.

"I don't wish to worry you, but I think you ought to stir yourself about 'The Metaphysic of Religion.' By the time you have finished it all your ideas will be old-fashioned. You don't seem to have any ambition. I am quite sick of telling people that you hope to publish it soon. I am sure they think it will end like that tiresome old Casaubon's 'Key to all the Mythologies.' Mr. Vallence hinted something of the sort at lunch to-day. Why do you trouble with all these committee meetings and things? *Other* Deans don't do it. I was trying to remember yesterday how many people you buried last year. I really think you

might drop the burying. It means a whole afternoon every time. When do those awful Divinity students begin work? It seems to me you take far too great pains with *them*. They are not worth it. Still, as they pay very well, you can't give them up just at present.

"If Lord Middlehurst puts Lionel up for the *Junior Devonshire*, the entrance fee won't be *more* than fifty. I forget the *exact* amount—but it will be such a good thing for him. In one way it is rather an awkward expense just now. I was rather hoping that you and I could manage a little run to Bellagio later on. I need a rest fully as much as you do. There's the dinner-gong.

"Your affectionate sister,

"E. Molle.

"P.S.—I want some money for a few bills. Better send a blank cheque."

He read this through and laughed; it reminded him of so many others in the same strain. At one time it would have filled him with bitterness, but now—could he not see Anna on the morrow? He sat down to write: he had a few ideas. This was the first:—*Thoughts, when the mind is thrall to some strong emotion, come in a sort of rhythm: it may be said that we think in a rough kind of blank verse.* He paused, then wrote rapidly on another slip of paper:—

> She seemed a flower—heiress to all the beauty,
> All the grace and fragrance of each flower
> Sprung since the world began.

He read it critically,—frowned,—smiled. It was, at

least, spontaneous; he could grant that. He read it again—*She seemed.* Ah! why had the word *seem* occurred to him? There was an example of the mind unconsciously hedging. He wanted the Truth, not the Semblance. It might be that the real Anna was plain-featured and ordinary: a little, dumpish woman: sallow, somewhat shrewish. Oh, that a man's eyes should be such traitors to his perception! He remembered that he had suffered the same harassing doubts in the case of Mrs. Prentice. "*Adgnosco veteris vestigia flammæ*," he murmured, and passed a sleepless night.

On the morrow, when he called at the Studio he made no excuse for his visit. He went as a matter of course; it seemed, indeed, the only thing to do.

As for Anna—she expected him, and wore a useless but adorable silk pinafore. The colour was pink: it pleased him to call it rose-jacynth. He decided, for all time, that she was lovely. And he was not mistaken.

VIII.

After Sacheverell had left the Vallences', Emily's whole manner changed. Her gaiety was astonishing. To Carlotta's dispassionate mind it seemed rather hysterical; her laugh was so much merrier than her eyes; her wit had the saltness of tears. Carlotta could not think she was unhappy. Every circumstance forbade the suspicion. As for Emily herself, she tried to believe—and to a certain extent succeeded in believing—that she was supremely contented. To be pretty, to be rich, to have a devoted lover—could she ask for more? To Go as much as one could, and Think as little as one might, was the secret of happiness.

"Thought should be unconscious," said Sir Richard; "it is a natural process like digestion."

"Perhaps you are right," sighed Emily.

She was too impressionable, too quick with her sympathy and too imaginative to be rigidly faithful to any one creed or any one creature. She could weave fairy garments for the ugliest scarecrow; if Ferdinand were absent she would find something to adore in the present Caliban. Was Sacheverell right, she wondered, was work and suffering the good part; or was Sir Richard—with his laws of Nature, and that Nature a smiling goddess—right?

"At one time," said Carlotta to her one day, "I thought you liked the Dean. He has not such

charming manners as Sir Richard, but one can hardly compare them."

"*Hyperion to a Satyr*," said Emily.

"What!" Carlotta's eyes opened wide.

"I—I did not mean Sir Richard by *Hyperion*."

"Emily, I'm afraid you are fickle."

"Perhaps I am."

"But if you liked the Dean——"

"I didn't exactly *like* him. I might have, but—— you see, I know quite well he despises me."

"How could he?"

Emily remembered the last look he gave her. "Well, I suppose he is more sorry for me than anything. It was so unpleasant, you know—he happened to come into the music-room when that stupid Richard was kissing my hand. I couldn't explain that it really wasn't my fault. I don't suppose I shall ever see him again. I don't care a bit—only—it isn't nice to know that he has got *quite* a wrong impression of me."

"One of these days," said Carlotta, "your flirting will bring you unhappiness. Sir Richard is not a man who will stand nonsense."

"Don't frighten me," said Emily, who was trembling already. Carlotta's words only confirmed her own fear.

"Do you love him?" said Carlotta.

"I don't know," said Emily. "I suppose I do—in a way. I am afraid of him. He is so determined."

"I wish you had never met him!" said Carlotta, prime instigator of their meetings.

"So do I," said Emily, with a sort of whimper.

"Have you promised to marry him?"

"He thinks I have. It comes to the same thing. Oh dear!"

"My dear Emily, this is too ridiculous."

"It's dreadful. But what can I do? I was never so worried in my life. We are going to Egypt. Egypt is *newer* than Paris. And a quiet wedding—just in my going-away dress. Do you think that a pale shade of grey trimmed with sable tails——"

"Why can't you be honest and admit that you are in love with him?"

"Well, he *is* very nice. You should hear him read Herrick. He feels every word of it, and it is not as though he were a man who had been in love a hundred times. I am the only one. Just think—out of all the women he has met. We *must* be happy."

"You can't command the future," said Carlotta, stonily.

"Let me think I can," said Emily, "that's half the battle," and (she was spending a few days with Carlotta) she went out of the room singing.

Nevertheless when she found herself in her own bedroom, with the door locked, she cried. She herself could have given no cause for her tears: that was the worst of it. It was an unsatisfactory misery in every sense — without beginning, or middle, or end, or reason, or hope. She paused once in her weeping to wonder what she could wear down to dinner. There was the velvet with *point de Flandres.* Sacheverell hated velvet, but Sacheverell was not there to see. The sobbing continued. To be loved was better than loving—much better. She would marry Sir Richard, who *worshipped* her, and forget—— There was no one to forget.

At dinner that evening she was dazzling. Sir Richard was there.

In the drawing-room, afterwards, Mrs. Molle and Carlotta sat by the fireplace and discussed bronchitis. Digby was confined to his room with neuralgia—and an adverse criticism. Sir Richard saw his chance. There was a window-seat some distance from the fire. Would Emily sit there and watch the stars? He knew a little about astronomy.

"This is our last night here—for some time," he said, in a low voice, "it is never so nice at Hurst Place."

"This is certainly very pleasant," said Emily. "What is the name of that star?"

"Do you remember what you promised?"

"I have promised ever so many things, haven't I? I hope I shall be able to keep some of them."

"You *must* keep *one*."

"That wasn't a promise—exactly. And I forget. What was it about?"

"You do not forget."

"Do take care! They will see you. You are hurting my hand. I suppose I *do* remember. How you tease! Besides—I was in fun."

"I was not."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to marry me."

"Marriage is so dull, Richard. There would be no more Herrick. . . . We are so happy as we are. Why spoil it? Men are never satisfied!"

"Yes, they are. If it were not for that Molle person and Carlotta! Shall we ever be alone together —ever able to talk except five yards apart, with our

eyes on the door or some old woman? I am sick of it. This is the sort of thing that drives people into matrimony. Don't laugh at me—it *is*. Emily, meet me in town on Monday. Let us be married quietly—by special license. We won't tell any one about it. You need only regard it as a form of engagement—if you like. I only want to know that you belong to me—that whatever happens, you are my wife. Is that much to ask—when I love you as I do?"

"Wouldn't it seem odd? What would people say?" The idea, however, appealed to her. Though it spelt a marriage certificate, it sounded like throwing her cap over the windmill. Irresistible witchcraft! Her eyes sparkled.

"What fun!" she said.

Everything, he saw, depended on his self-restraint. A movement, an expression, a word too much or too little, and his case would be ruined. That she was a nice problem in diplomatics was not the least considerable of her fascinations: he could never be sure of her. She was not a woman one could woo dozing. He looked round. Mrs. Molle and Carlotta had gone into the little boudoir which led off from the drawing-room. He could hear their voices: they were searching for a mislaid letter. Swiftly and boldly he caught Emily in his arms and—did not kiss her. He just put his lips to her ear and said, "You are so beautiful!" Badly managed, the thing would have been a hug. Unspeakable vulgarity! As he did it, however, it was a movement of much grace indicative of passion.

Emily said nothing.

"Dearest, you will come on Monday?"

She lifted up her face to say "No." It somehow got mixed on the way with a "Yes" from Sir Richard. The combination was no syllable.

They were married, however, by a Bishop, assisted by an Archdeacon. Every one agreed that it was even grander than her first wedding.

IX.

For Sacheverell the sun had not set for a fortnight; for Anna, there had been magic in the moon. They had seen each other every day: they had been for several strolls into the country. She always walked with him to his hotel or till they were in sight of it, and he invariably walked back with her again to her studio. The childishness of the performance caused them endless merriment. They also read together: once or twice they managed to finish a whole paragraph. For some reason, however, she never touched her picture. "I can always paint," she said; "I have been painting all my life. I have not always had you —nor can I have you always." He had told her that he loved her; she had made answer that men were very fickle: that Love was the Eternal Lie, and the man who told it the prettiest was the best poet. She, herself, was not, as the phrase goes, in love with him, but she was under his influence. Sacheverell's dreamy, speculative mind was especially delightful to her, a woman who had never found leisure for dreaming, and to whom the high sphere of speculative thought was an undiscovered country. There was a gentleness, too, in his character, a resignation to the will of God —or of anybody—which seemed divinely meek to her more rebellious nature. When she told him the long story of her short life, of her husband, of Kilcoursie, she forgot all her past unhappiness in the fact that he, in the Present, was listening and understanding.

"Talking to you," she said to him, "is only thinking to myself—made easier."

That evening he was to meet Mrs. Molle at Paddington, whence they would leave for Tenchester. He could not see Anna for at least ten days.

"It will be strange to-morrow and to-morrow," she said, "not to have you with me."

"And I——" said Sacheverell.

"Will you miss me?"

"You know I will."

"I am so glad. . . . I ought not—it's hateful—but I want you—to be miserable." She opened a cardboard box which stood in a corner of the room, and produced an unconsidered trifle in the shape of some ribbons and feathers. She put it on her head, and in so doing managed to brush some tears from her eyelashes.

"Do you like my new hat?" she said. This was her way of changing the subject.

"Is that bow meant to stick up?"

"Of course; flat bows are hideous. Nothing would induce me to alter it. *Nothing*. . . . Perhaps you will like it better when you get used to it."

"Perhaps."

"*Why* don't you like it now?"

"I do," he said.

She smiled with happiness. "I love nice clothes. I could live in a garret and sleep on the floor and eat bread and apples, or bread without the apples—but I *must* have pretty gowns."

"You are very beautiful in anything," he said.

"If you think so," she answered, as gravely, "it will make me beautiful!"

"Anna," he said, quickly, "if we could be together always!"

"Together—always," she repeated.

"Just think of it—you with your painting and me—who knows? I might finish my book. We might go to Mount Athos."

"On Mount Athos," said Anna, "there would be no philosophy—but a fiddle and some picturesque rags."

"I am afraid we must not drop philosophy," he said.

"In that case," said Anna, "we must drop Mount Athos and take an attic. It would have to be an attic—we should be so poor. But we would work and work and work. Between us we might accomplish something! Would the days ever be long enough? I would do the cooking. I can make an omelette and a beef-steak pie—but I have forgotten most of the pie. Do you mind?"

He laughed. "Should we be able to afford beef-steak?"

"We should be called The Dean and his minx," said Anna. "*What* would Eleanor say?"

"Suppose we went down and resigned the Deanery together," he suggested. "But are you—crying?"

"No, it is only the light—it is a little strong for my eyes. I—I have been using them too much lately. Ten whole days to wait—before I can see you again. It seems such a long time. So many things can happen in ten days. . . . I will work at the picture, but—sometimes I think it will never be finished. Whenever I see hope something happens. I—I heard to-day," she went on, "from my husband. He is in money difficulties again. The thirty pounds

I sent him to pay some bills with he has used for something else. So he wants another thirty. That means I must accept Stock's offer for the black and whites. I am getting so tired—and worried. I am strong really—very strong. I *ought* to be able to work nine hours a day—but I can't."

"And I can do nothing to help you?" said Sacheverell. "Must I see you toiling like this for that man? Am I powerless? a log? a stone?"

"I shall be all right," she said, "if you write to me every day. You have given me so much courage that nothing seems too hard for me."

Their farewell was in silence.

Her letters for the next week were full of humour—of hope—of plans for the future. "Seventy-two more hours and then I shall see you. I am so glad, that I feel almost afraid to think of it." So she wrote in the morning. That same night she sent another note to say she had received word that her husband was lying seriously ill—at the point of death—alone in his lodgings. "I must go to him," she wound up. "I will do what I can. He has no friend in the world. The very sight of him stifles me. I would sooner house with a rattlesnake than go near him. But he is ill. I have no choice in the matter."

Sacheverell, who knew the horrors of her married life as no one else knew them, read her letter and felt it was her death warrant. He was staring at it when Eleanor rushed into the study waving the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

"The Bishop of Gaunt is dead," she panted, and looked the rest. He neither heard nor saw her.

"George is not so ill as I expected," Anna next wrote; "he is certainly weak, but there is nothing really serious the matter with him. I cannot help thinking—well, perhaps you can guess. Still, as I am here, I will not leave him till he is convalescent. I am not feeling very well. My eyes pain me. I am obliged to work at night when he is asleep. Of course, it is a strain. I hope to be out of the house on Saturday." The note was dated Thursday. On Sunday morning Sacheverell received the following:—

"14, CARBURY STREET,
"TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD.

"DEAR SIR,—My wife desires me to say that she has been unable to finish the drawings she promised you. She is not well enough to write herself, but she hopes to be able to do so in a few days.

"Yours very truly,
"GEORGE CHRISTIAN."

During the four months that followed—months of such dull madness that it seemed sanity—Sacheverell managed to hear both directly and indirectly how she was. Not that inquiries were necessary—he knew by a strange instinct her good days and her bad days. He also knew that she would never recover.

"At one time you thought you would like to be a Bishop," said Eleanor; "now you have got your wish you don't seem to care a bit."

"I believe I am called a Bishop," he answered, with a strange smile. "Poor Doddridge!"

Doddridge was his predecessor.

X.

Anna wrote to him at last to come and see her.

The day was dim: rain seemed to be falling, though it left no trace on the damp road and pavements. Carbury Street—at best a cheerless row of unhomelike dwellings—had to Sacheverell's overwrought mind a terribly ominous gloom. In Number 14, one light was burning on the second floor; he guessed it was Anna's sitting-room. He walked up the steps slowly—with no gladness, no hope, only a weight at his heart. A dull little maid-servant ushered him up the stairs; he gave his name in a voice he did not recognise; the servant girl disappeared behind a *portière*, came out again and left him. As the door closed, the *portière* moved and Anna stood before him.

"Well?" she said, smiling, "well?"

Sacheverell put out his hand and just touched her. She was not a Spirit. She wore the dress he had last seen her in—one he knew well—a black garment of very ordinary make, threadbare but exquisitely neat. Her eyes were large, and shone with unearthly brightness; her face had a white radiance which was neither deathlike nor human. The beauty of her countenance made him dumb; he felt she had seen a glory he knew not of—nor guessed. She led him into an inner room—a tiny room lit by a flaring oil-

lamp, badly trimmed and smelling of paraffin. Again they faced each other.

"I cannot see you very well," said Anna, at last, "but you are the same—a little thinner—but the same. Is it the light on your hair or—is it grey? How I wish I could see you better. I have lived for this."

"Am I granite?" wondered Sacheverell, "am I human?" But he said nothing.

"Tell me about *you*," said Anna; "tell me about your Palace. Have you a nice, big study—with a large window and long shelves for your books? Does it open on to the garden?"

"Oh, my dearest," said Sacheverell, "have you been well taken care of? Have you everything you wish? I want to know—and I don't seem able——"

She laughed, and took his hand. "I thought it was all ended twice. George was very frightened—he soon loses his nerve—but, you see, I am here." She bent over him, and he thought she kissed his forehead. "When can we have one of our old walks together? I cannot go far yet. Not more than two miles——"

"Two miles! My dearest——"

"Don't you believe me? I can—I am sure I could—with you."

"No," he stammered, "no—not yet. The weather—the weather is not bright enough. You must rest a little longer. Perhaps in March."

Her eyes looked far away: she seemed a little disappointed. "In March," she repeated; "but it is only February, now. In March!"

"Anna," he said, "I have known—I have always known—when you were suffering. Where is Christian? Does he take care of you?"

"He thinks he is being very kind," she said; "he means to be, at any rate."

"I will forgive him everything," said Sacheverell, "if he takes care of you."

"Don't you see," she said, "don't you understand—that *his* care is what is killing me? That it *has* killed me? I feel as though I were in prison. I cannot tell him so. I cannot tell the doctors so. Besides, I am too weak to be moved. Mine was the mistake. I should not have returned to him. But I could not let him die. The very sight of him," she said again, "kills me."

"I know—I know, I *knew*," he said.

"Don't let us talk of it. In March—perhaps something will happen in March. You said March, didn't you? I am supposed to be suffering from a sort of overwork. I shall never finish 'Pompilia' now. But tell me about *you*."

"How are your money matters?" he said, abruptly. The question was wrung from him. He looked round the shabby, cold room, and hated himself and his palace.

"In a few weeks I shall be in the poorhouse," said Anna, laughing. "A new experience! It will all be useful to my work. Local colour!"

"Anna," he said, desperately, "you *must* let me——"

"I am only in fun, of course," she said. "If I wanted anything, I would tell you. You know I would. But I shall soon be well again, and away from here. If only my eyes—— Let me look at you once more." She sighed at once, and turned away. He saw a tear roll down her cheek. "Do

you think," she said, "we shall ever see the Studio—again?"

He made no answer, but, following a blind instinct, caught her hand. He knew afterwards that it was a pitiful effort to hold her from Death.

"I suppose you must go now," she said. He felt that this was her way of telling him that her strength was failing. He rose, and kissed her good-bye. "I *have* lived, dearest," said Anna.

A little later he found himself in the street. All feeling had left him: he had no mind—not even enough to wonder whether his soul were dead. He walked into the gathering darkness—on and on. Then by degrees he remembered that the meeting he had longed, without hoping for—had taken place. He had gained his heart's desire: he had seen Anna once more—spoken to her—touched her—heard her voice. Swifter than words the thought rushed over him that he must see her again and explain: he had been cold, distant, speechless, impossible.

He drove back to Carbury Street.

The landlady opened the door this time. She told him that Mrs. Christian was resting on the sofa: she had not felt quite strong enough yet to go upstairs to her room. She was wonderful easy tired. But she would, no doubt, see him.

"I was obliged to come back, Anna," he said, when he saw her. "I think my heart is broken; but, you know—I love you. Words are nothing."

Anna laughed. "I understand, of course," she said. "How could I misunderstand you? My dearest and best—my very dearest."

He drew a long sigh. "If you understand," he

said, "that is enough. But I wanted to make sure." He knelt down by her side and kissed her hands.

"It is not every one," she said, "who can say—as I can say—I have found perfect happiness and perfect love. I think of that, and forget everything else. Good-bye. You will come again—soon?"

"Soon," he said.

In the hall he met a man, drunken, not ill-featured, but of evil expression. He reeled past Sacheverell with a dull stare, and groped his way up the staircase, bawling:—

> "It is not mine to sing the stately grace,
> The sweet soul shining in my lady's face.
> Not mine in glo-glorious melodies——"

It was George Christian. And it was for him to close her eyes in death.

XI.

Two days later, Sacheverell received a letter from Mrs. Grimmage.

"SIR,—Mrs. Christian died suddenly this morning. She sent for me, poor dear lady. I am too upset to write more. My lord, your obedient,

"E. GRIMMAGE."

"Have you got bad news, Peter?" said Mrs. Molle. They were sitting at the luncheon-table. He had already told her of Anna's illness, and she had guessed the rest—or enough. As the woman was dying (by a Special Providence), she viewed the situation with complacency. "Is it bad news?" she repeated.

"I expected it," he said, briefly, and left the room.

The blow had fallen: he could weep—a little. The heart-breaking anxiety, the terrible despair of the past four months vanished like evil spirits: he felt and believed that she was with him: that they were together as they had never been when life seemed fairest. And, as he looked into the Past, he saw how they both—by silent agreement—had left the end unimagined. With them each day had been but a beginning.

And now it was finished.

When Sacheverell entered the chamber of death he

saw Anna lying on the bed, her hands folded on her breast, her eyes closed as though she were resting them. Such beauty and such peace were beyond all words or tears. He knelt down by the bedside. . . .

He was next conscious of another presence in the room. He looked up, and saw Sir Richard Kilcoursie.

Kilcoursie was the first to speak. "I have just returned," he said, catching his breath, "from my honeymoon. . . . Some one called Grimmage sent me word. . . . I loved her," he added, fiercely, "I loved her. I never knew how much. Do you think she knows? She looks so still. She was always out of my reach, and now—for ever. . . . I was never good enough. There was no one like her. No one."

Sacheverell bowed his head.

They heard the sound of sobbing behind them. It was Mrs. Grimmage.

"Doesn't she look beautiful?" she said, wiping her eyes. "I have never seen nothing to equal it. . . . We did all we could. We might have saved her if she'd have given in sooner. But she never would give in. She kept on saying, 'I shall soon be all right again,' and she wouldn't have the doctor in till this last week or two. She worked herself to death—and starved, if the truth was known. It's my firm belief that she only had a dinner when I reg'lar sat down and made her. I don't believe in them lunches she used to *say* she had at the Studio. . . . And that husband of hers was always nagging for money, and she gave it till there was next to nothing left but bare rent. I have been putting two and two together, and that's my conclusion. It's

cruel hard, it is. She might ha' eat me out of house and home, poor dear, for less than the asking. It's a life thrown away, that's what it is. Clean thrown away. And that husband of hers, with his three changes of air a year and a hot lunch every day of his life—*he* flourishes, he does. He's upstairs now—taking on. You never see'd such antics. Reg'lar high-strikes. He's fit to bust hisself crying. But he's got just enough sense to stop before the bust comes. Let him howl. That's what I say. Let him howl! . . . There ain't no use trying to understand Providence. To take *her* and leave *him*."

"I could not wish her back," said Sacheverell. He bent over and kissed Anna's marble brow—marble-cold and more radiant than the lilies on her breast—and then passed out of the room. Her spirit followed him: he left Kilcoursie gazing at her dead body.

When he reached home it was late in the evening. But he sat down to work at his sermon for the following Sunday. And he worked well; writing had not been so easy to him for months—for months it had been a painful labour.

Eleanor watched him curiously. His calmness seemed to her a little unfeeling. She had always given him credit for a certain amount of heart. She could only compare his position to her own when the Major died, and she had been distracted. Her prostrate condition had been the talk of every tea-party in Ballincollig for weeks. If Peter *had* been in love with that extraordinary artist-woman, he certainly had a very singular way of showing it.

"Will you preach to-morrow, as usual?" she ventured to say.

"Of course," he said, without looking up from his paper. "Shall I not live as she would have me live—working?"

But the future, as he saw it, was dim. . . .

Some years afterwards the Bishop of Gaunt confided his brief love-story to a friend.

"But why," said the friend, "since the husband had forfeited every right to be considered, why didn't you punch his head and bear the woman off in triumph?"

"To tell the truth," said Sacheverell, "I was tempted to some such decisive measure — sorely tempted."

"If you had succumbed," said the friend, drily, "she would have recovered."

"Don't say so," said Sacheverell, putting out his hand; "*I think I know it.*"

The friend, who was a psychologist, went home with more material for his great work on *Impulse and Reason.*

If the gods have no sense of humour they must weep a great deal.

A STUDY IN TEMPTATIONS

To A.

DESIDERIUM ANIMÆ EJUS TRIBUISTI EI DOMINE, ET VOLUNTATE LABIORUM EJUS NON FRAUDASTI EUM.

VITAM PETIIT A TE, ET TRIBUISTI EI LONGITUDINEM DIERUM IN SÆCULUM SÆCULI.

February 7th, 1892.

"In order to judge whether what is said or done by any character be well or ill, we are not to consider that speech or action alone, whether in itself it be good or bad, but also by whom it is spoken or done, to whom, at what time, in what manner, or for what end. . . .

"To opinion, or what is commonly said to be, may be referred even such things as are improbable and absurd; and it may also be said that events of that kind are, sometimes, not really improbable; since, 'it is probable that many things should happen contrary to probability.'"—Aristot., *Poet.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

In the brief sketches of Farmer Battle and Miss Caroline Battle, the author's aim has been to suggest, not to reproduce, a dialect; and by so doing he ventures to think he is humbly following many great examples.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THIS little work has been received with such extraordinary kindness, and the author has been scolded for its faults with such generosity and grace, that he could almost wish he might offend his critics again, if only for the honour of being so wittily rebuked. There is a story told of a man who begged his wife to tell him his besetting sin, "In order," said he, "that I may conquer it, and so please you in all respects." With much reluctance, and only after many exhortations to be honest, the lady replied that she feared he was selfish. "I am not perfect," said her husband, "and perhaps I am a sinful creature, but if there is one fault which I thank God I do not *possess it is selfishness. Anything but that!" and as he spoke, he passed her the apples—they were at luncheon—and set himself to work on the only peach. Now the author is in the same frame of mind with regard to the charge of flippancy: he cannot bring himself to own that he is flippant: he longs to be told his short-comings, he is most eager to please his readers in all respects, but he will not admit that he is cynical—anything but that. He is by nature so extremely serious that, like the good angel who liked laughter, he has thought it wiser to curb his disposition at all events for the present. A greater part of the book was composed under the strain of bad health, and all of it in circumstances of peculiar anxiety. If the author had written as he felt and thought, the result would have been very far from amusing. And his sole aim has been to amuse. In times of illness, irritability, and grief, he has often cast*

about him for some light reading—simple yet not altogether meaningless, unreal yet not impossible : he has longed to draw a veil on actualities and see a shadow-life frisking on tiptoes, followed by a dance of sorrows ana a merry-making of cares. He does not presume to say that he has fulfilled his own desire in the following pages, but the desire in question may explain their tone.

In conclusion, this fantasia makes no claim to the great title of novel, and is, indeed, no more than it is called—"A Study in Temptations"—and it will be found that at least one form of temptation, if not more, is dealt with in each chapter.

A Study in Temptations.

PROLOGUE.

WHICH CONTAINS ALL THE TRAGEDY OF THE BOOK.

"*MARY CECILIA, aged seventeen, with whom lies buried all the hope, all the belief in God and goodness of her husband, Charles Sydney Jenyns.*"

The grave-digger who spelled out this inscription on the coffin, nudged his companion, and they clambered up the sides of the grave to stare after a man, who, with dragging steps and bent head, was slowly groping his way out of the cemetery. He avoided the path, and slunk round and among the numerous mounds and monuments, frequently stumbling, and often halting outright.

" Did you see 'is face ? " said the elder of the grave-diggers ; " 'e ain't a day more'n two-and-twenty. 'Tain't every one as marries so fool'ardy young as gits out of it so easy ! "

His assistant, less philosophical but more kindly, blinked his eyes and gave a cheerless laugh. " 'E pro'bly thinks," he said, " as 'e's the 'ardest done-by in the 'ole world. 'E don't see as it all stands to reason, as you and me do, bless yer. 'E only thinks as when 'e gits 'ome there won't be nobody there ! "

"I knows some," said his senior, with a grim smile, "as 'ud thank the Almighty if they could go 'ome and find the 'ouse empty! *They* wouldn't say nothink agin the goodness of Gord, *they* wouldn't. *They* wouldn't be writin' none of this 'ere. *They* would be foldin' their 'ands and sayin' as Gord's will is for the best, and be-yaving theirselves like Christians!"

Then they resumed their work, and in working forgot to moralize.

The object of their remarks, meanwhile, having refused to drive home in the solitary mourning coach which with the hearse had formed the funeral procession, found his strength so unequal to the task of walking, that he sank on a bench outside a public-house, which stood conveniently near the entrance to the cemetery. He was, as the grave-digger had observed, quite young and certainly not more than two-and-twenty. He was tall, but somewhat bent—not that he stooped, there was rather a leaning forward of his whole body. His brilliant eyes seemed to have burnt deep into their sockets, and they cast a flickering light on the pallor of his cheeks, which looked the more pale in contrast with his dark hair.

He was at an early stage of grief, and he felt as though he were two beings — one, speechless and stricken; the other, a mere spectator, who philosophized, and mocked, and wept, and laughed by starts and was only constant in watching. That he was sorrowful, he guessed—but what was sorrow? He knew that he had loved—yet what was love? He lived—and what was life? Mary was dead. Immortality might be, but she once was. O lovely fact to weigh against the ghost-like possibility!

To whatever end his thoughts were tending (and the way was broad), they were diverted, for the moment at least, by the potman, who, moved by compassion, or following his invariable custom in dealing with mourners, came out to tell him that there was a private room within, where he would find a fire, writing materials, and the daily papers. Jenyns, to his own amazement, but as the potman had foreseen, acted on the hint and followed him into a small, musty room which barely atoned for its stale odour, its dismal light, and oppressive warmth, by being empty. The potman poked the fire, smoothed out the *Sportsman*, stirred the ink with the one quill in the pen-tray, and, while thus exercising his hands, had his eyes and his wits concentrated on the mysterious and melancholy wayfarer.

The interest Jenyns had created in the minds of the grave-diggers, was slight compared with the sensation he had unconsciously produced among the patrons of the "Jolly Nell." (The original sign had been the "Jolly Knell," but this having been repudiated by the present proprietor—an Irishman—as Dutch spelling, the *K* was painted out.) Jenyns's bearing, appearance and expression were so unusual, and his features so handsome, that had the same gossips met him under the most commonplace conditions, they would still have paused to guess his calling, or to wonder what path lay before him. On this occasion, however, the despair on his countenance, the possible romance connected with it, and the unlikeness between himself and the mean—almost abject—circumstances of the funeral, gave him a prominence far greater, than if he had buried his dead with every elegant sign of still more elegant grief.

As the landlady pointed out, had he been really poor, he would have driven home in the carriage—a poor man could not afford to miss such chances; further, he would not have been alone, for his family, or at least his neighbours, would have seized the opportunity for a breath of fresh air and a nice change: they would have made it, in fact, a chastened holiday-jaunt. She did not use that particular phrase, but her nod was to that effect. Her crowning observation that he was a student, or something of that, who had got some young woman into trouble, and the poor thing had died of a broken heart, and he was being eat up by remorse, was made in a whisper so thrilling, that it pierced through the thin door and reached Jenyns's sensitive ear. He waited to hear no more, but leaving half-a-crown (his last) on the table, walked so quickly and noiselessly out of the house, that the group in the bar-room, who were so eagerly discussing him, did not notice his departure.

Once on the main road, he seemed to gain a certain composure and his strength of limb; he walked hurriedly and was, in fact, racing against the thoughts which threatened every moment to outstrip and overcome him. When he finally halted it was nearly evening, and he had reached a dingy dwelling in one of the streets near King's Cross. The neighbourhood was poor and the door of the house stood open—as doors may, when there is little to offer friends and nothing to tempt the thieving.

A small boy and his mother stood by the area railings, and they both looked after Jenyns as he passed in.

"Mother," said the boy, tugging at the woman's

apron—"mother, next time a lodger dies may I have another half-holiday?"

Jenyns heard the question, and, smiling faintly, walked slowly up the creaking staircase till he reached a room on the fourth landing. He crept in and gazed stupidly around it: noticed that there was a cupboard door half-open, a few medicine bottles on the mantelpiece, a pile of women's garments on a chair, a white straw hat, trimmed with ribbons, on the chest of drawers. Inch by inch his eyes travelled from the chair to the table, from the table to the floor, from the floor to a pair of small, muddy shoes with ridiculous French heels, from the shoes to the bed, and there, as it seemed to him, he saw her lying as she had been for two days past, before they lifted her into the coffin.

"God! O God!" he called.

But no God answered.

He bent over the imaginary form. "Wake up!" he whispered—"wake up! You are dreaming, that's all. You have often dreamt before. Wake up! Mary! Mary! are you so tired?"

Outside the house he heard a rustling, a strange shrieking and wailing. Was it *all* the wind? It seemed to the half-crazed man a Presence—a host of Presences swarming in at the windows, down the chimney, and gathering round him.

"I do not fear you," he said; "there is no worse torment than living. Where you are, Hell must be, and you are everywhere. Pain is nothing; everything is nothing; You are nothing. But—damn you—I will believe in you if you can wake"—he pointed to the empty bed—"if you can wake *one of us*."

"I cannot," said a sorrowful voice. Jenyns rubbed his eyes, and burst out laughing.

"Oh, is it only you, Wrath?" he said. "What a fool I am; I thought you were the devil."

The man he addressed, and who had followed him into the room unperceived, was of middle height and extraordinarily thin: his features and form looked misty and ill-defined, as though he stood behind a cloud and were trying to pierce through it.

"Would you have your wife live again that she may die again?" he said, quietly—"that you may bury her again?"

"No, no," muttered Jenyns—"no, no, not *this* again. A jump from the window or a prick at my throat would settle my mind for ever. If there *is* a hereafter I would know it, and if there isn't—well, I could not feel the disappointment. Clay has no illusions to lose. You see," he added, "I have not called up the devil for nothing!"

Jenyns's idea of religion—picked from street-corners and Ingersoll—began and ended with the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. When he was happy and thought himself an enlightened believer in the possibility of a Supreme Reason, he forgot it; when he was in trouble, he could think of nothing else. Sometimes it filled him with panic, sometimes with desperation: more often than all with a longing to be in the Place of Torment—to know the worst, to put an end to the torturing suspense and doubt.

"If the devil can answer your curses," said Wrath, "why not try whether God will answer prayers?"

"Cursing is quick," said Jenyns, "and prayers are

long. Call Satan but under your breath and he comes. But God—you may wear out your knees and your voice before He will answer, and then He will give you not peace but a sword, not ease but a thorn in the flesh, not love but chastisements! The greater the saint, the thicker the scourge! Where's the fool who would pray day and night for such blessings? Have I not grief enough and despair enough but I must entreat for more?"

Wrath groaned. "Human nature is so discontented!" he said: "I have been starving for a month, and I must own that this constant gnawing at one's vitals becomes tedious: I would prefer a newer pain."

"Let us both pray for another sort of anguish," said Jenyns, "the good old monks were artistic: they believed that variety was beauty, so they occasionally skinned a heretic before they boiled him!"

Wrath accepted this as a sign of returning cheerfulness. "The story runs so well," he said, "I will not be pedantic and press for your authority. But it sounds like an evangelical tract." He rose from his seat and began to pace the floor. Life to him was a pilgrimage, and the fortunes and misfortunes of the journey troubled him but a little; he could not understand despair. "Perhaps you are best alone," he said; "my mother used to say that to be alone with grief was to live in company with angels. I think she knew; she had a great deal to endure. If I sell my picture we can run over to Venice together; I mean, of course, if you would care to go with me. . . . I do not wonder this room is gloomy; it has stolen the odour of a dozen honest dinners. Let us go down in the kitchen and see the baby. I sketched her this

morning; here it is: 'Study of an Infant Genius: aged four days.'"

"Don't talk of her," said Jenyns, fiercely; "I never wish to look upon her face again. She killed her mother. . . . I see no God in nature—only Hell, cruel, relentless, hideous."

"Bah!" said Wrath. "Don't get your nose in an artificial manure heap and think you are studying nature. If you take Zola for your gospel and the gospel for fiction, God must help you. I cannot. Where is your spirit?"

"I do not want to be a hero," said Jenyns, sullenly, "or a saint; I want my wife."

"Heroes and husbands are made by the occasion," said Wrath; "no one is born a husband and no one is born a pious, homicidal hero! At first he is just man—man with a birthright of seven deadly sins and one small conscience. There never was a saint, you may rest perfectly sure, but he might have fallen twenty times a day, if he had not fought the enemy with fine courage. Why don't you howl because the trees are bare? Who would think that such grim skeletons could ever be bright with leaves again, or look just as they did last year? Yet they will; and so, when the time comes, you will see your wife; you have only buried the dead leaves of a soul." At no time an eloquent man but always one to whom speech was even a painful effort, he went out of the room after this outburst. With the inconsequence of the artistic reason he had a sudden idea for a picture he was then designing.

Jenyns was once more alone. He gave a feeble laugh and hurried to the window; it was open; he

looked down and shivered. Then he looked up at the dark sky.

"God," he said, "if you are there, and if you know everything, you must be sorry for me."

He climbed up on the sill, held out his arms, and with a sob leapt into the night and eternity.

A second later Wrath re-entered. He was breathless, and was reading a letter.

"Now admit," he said, "there *is* a God who answers prayers. We can go to Venice. Tooth has sold my 'Antigone.' Three hundred——"

His only answer was a shout of horror, a hum of voices, a sound of hurrying in the street below. He leaned out of the window and understood the confusion.

"*Mater Dei!*" he cried. "Ah, don't groan! Lift him gently! Take care! Five pounds—twenty — to the man who is quickest with the doctor!"

A man looked up from the crowd. "I should like to see the five pound *fust*," he said. A faint titter greeted his wisdom; an old woman sobbed.

"Come away!" said a girl, who was hanging on the arm of her sweetheart; "there is always something to spoil my evening out!"

The titter and the sob, the sweetheart's retreating footsteps, and Jenyns's death moan, each gave their note to the great unceasing murmur of the city.

I.

UP-AT-BATTLE'S.

The family of Drawne was not distinguished till the time of the Reformation, when one Richard Drawne was rewarded for his holy zeal in the suppression of monasteries, by a large grant of confiscated church property, including the Abbey of St. Wilfred, with the manor-house, monastery and demesne lands of the same, amounting to four thousand three hundred acres. He did not live long to enjoy his honours, but died of a fever, leaving his daughter, Anne, sole heiress. In the reign of Edward VI. this lady married the Earl of Warbeck, and thus brought her great wealth to that ancient house which had become sadly impoverished for various but uninteresting causes. The heiress, however, was very tenacious of her female right, and left no legal loopholes by which her property could become one with the Warbeck peerage: the Drawne acres were an inheritance past comparison with any empty earldom. But during three centuries of struggle and change which followed, male heirs in direct succession never failed, and the Earls of Warbeck, by innocently anticipating the miraculous policy of the Vicar of Bray, not only held their possessions, but escaped the inconvenient glories of persecution and martyrdom.

At the time of our story, Henry Fitzgerald George

Vandeleur Shannon was 15th Earl of Warbeck, and one Jane Shannon stood in the inconsiderable relation of niece to his lordship. Jane's father had been the fourth son of the late Earl—a kinship in itself sufficiently contemptible from the standpoint of the heir, but when the said fourth son married the daughter of a yeoman-farmer, he lost even the small right he had to twinkle in the Warbeck heaven, and was considered —not a fallen star, but no star at all.

Since the object of such just indignation and scorn was unable to earn his own bread (from the fact, no doubt, that he had half-killed himself writing a Prize Essay—"De Labore"), he lived on the charity of his yeoman father-in-law till, as he himself expressed it, he left a world where he was not wanted, to abide with that sleek host, the worm. In other words, he died of his own grim humour, assisted by a certain difficulty in breathing, a trouble in his liver, a pain in his head, and a grip at his left side. His wife, who was with child at the time of his death, postponed breaking her heart till she had brought forth her little one, and then she turned her sad face to the wall, and died also. The care of the child thus fell to the yeoman-farmer, who, by this time, may be said to have some claim on the reader's sympathy.

Samuel Battle—such was his name—came of sound stock. One John Battle and Matthew his brother had fought under Cromwell. Their descendants, under the Restoration, had, with two exceptions, abandoned the field of war for the more tranquil, if less conspicuous, honours of farming. Of the exceptions, one was a certain Anthony, a scholar and wit, who wrote some love verses and a comedy (composi-

tions, which, dying to posterity, had left their reputation like some unhallowed spirit to haunt the family conscience); the other, Nicholas, was one of the some two thousand clergy who were expelled from their parishes for Nonconformity in 1662. It was from this Nicholas that Samuel Battle, the yeoman-farmer, took his descent. Jane Shannon was heiress, therefore, to many conflicting dispositions.

Battle's farm, or, as it was known in the district, "Up-at-Battle's," lay some eight miles to the east of Brentmore, a small watering-place in the south of England, noted for its scenery, its climate, and the sleep-bringing mission of its air. The farm-house was unpretentious, and though presenting to a town-trained eye an appearance of picturesque antiquity, it was, in fact, an extremely ugly cottage of the Victoria era, made to look rambling and picturesque by means of the numerous rooms, store-cupboards, and outhouses added to it during Battle's own lifetime. The property, when he first came into possession, had consisted of pasture-land, a small orchard, and a large yard. The greater part of the original homestead (built about 1700) had been destroyed by fire, and Battle's father, acting on the advice of a young and second wife, had completed the work of destruction, by building on its ruins the aforesaid Victorian cottage. An unkind rumour had it, that what remained of the best parlour of the first Mrs. Battle, could now be recognised in the most retired portion of the dwelling.

Samuel Battle, on coming into his inheritance, was not slow to show himself a man of singular energy, perseverance, and shrewdness: he was quick to see

that letting land was more profitable than tilling it. He was also in favour of small plots and short leases—the advantages of which, as he was careful to point out to dubious tenants, cut both ways, although they might occasionally cut a bit deeper on one side than on the other. An enigmatic saying, which time and the increasing value of the ground made clear.

His education, culled as it was from the Scriptures, and guiltless of School Board trimmings, gave him a command of language, a stern dignity and sterner refinement, than could be found now in younger men of his station, who too often talk big words from their favourite newspaper, mistake insolence for independence, and swagger for good breeding. Dr. Johnson's saying that "the Devil was the first Whig" was the first article of Battle's political belief, and, a staunch Nonconformist, he so far availed himself of the right of private judgment that where his co-religionists read "*Down with authority*," he only discovered exhortations to obedience. He was, therefore, a Tory, but for no other reason than because he did not see how a professed Christian could be anything else. From which it would seem that if Samuel Battle did wrong he did it rightly.

At the time of which we write, the inmates of the farm-house numbered four, and were Battle himself, his spinster daughter Miss Caroline, his one grandchild Jane Shannon, and a young boy named De Boys Mauden, who was his nephew by marriage—a relative as distant as he was poor.

Jane was three years younger than De Boys, and when he first came to the farm-house, he was seven, and she, four. He was handsome, but she was a plain

little creature, all eyes and legs, though the eyes had fire, and the legs were shapely.

This child as she grew up was taught to read and write, to add figures, to make butter and jam, to do plain sewing, and to work hideous patterns with Berlin wool on blue canvas. When she was nine, she was sent to a day-school, and had lessons in drawing, French, and music, and her education, on the whole, was no less thorough than that of many young ladies of fashion. She could write, "The gardener's wife has two children" in a foreign language, and she, too, in the course of time strummed Heller's "Tarentella," the "Moonlight" sonata, and Chopin's Valses. She played them to De Boys long before he had learnt the manners to listen.

She was brought up as a Dissenter, but her father had been a devout Catholic, and it had been promised that when she arrived at years of discretion, she would be given every opportunity to hear the claims of Catholicism. In the meantime, however, no pains were spared to warn her against Antichrist, the Mother of harlots, and idolatry; for the wives and daughters of the deacons thought it a terrible sign of more iniquitous practices to come, when it was known that she cherished her dead father's rosary and crucifix.

Jane's instructor in the useful arts, such as mending, darning, patchwork, and the like, was her aunt, Miss Caroline. Miss Caroline Battle was what men call a sensible woman, which is a way of saying that she did not attach too much weight to their smiles, although she could always smile in her turn. She was comely, too, with soft brown eyes and a pillow-

like figure, which counteracted the occasional sharpness of her tongue. Miss Caroline, like happy Peter Bell, beheld but did not speculate: she tended her garden, watched the stars, and read two chapters of Scripture every night of her life. She kept hens, and ducks, and bees, and her butter was the pride of the country. She possessed a Maltese lace shawl, and an illustrated Shakespeare, also a set of Whitby jet ornaments, and an amethyst brooch. These treasures, however, she kept locked in her wardrobe because they were heirlooms, and as such were treasured in silver paper. For light literature she gave Jane "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Lady Audley's Secret," "Amy Herbert," "Paul and Virginia," "Roderick Random," "Æsop's Fables," "Robinson Crusoe," and, on Sunday afternoons and anniversaries, Dante's "Inferno," illustrated by Dorè. The horrors of this last, while they struck misery to Jane's soul, were largely mitigated by the story of Francesca de Rimini, which, Miss Caroline thought, could only be edifying, since, from all she could gather, the whole Rimini family were in Hell, and burning examples of foreign immorality and its just reward. Why so gentle a being as Caroline Battle should take satisfaction, so deep-reaching that it amounted to pleasure, in a tale which for exciting pity and terror is hardly to be matched, can only be accounted for on the ground, that Hell and sin, as actualities, were so impossible to her imagination, that she believed in one and disapproved of the other as a child swallows medicine, and "hates" porridge.

To Jane, however, whose character was of a very different cast—for she saw everything through the

rainbow haze of her own moods—the idea of being damned for love became so familiar and so fascinating, that to love *without* losing one's soul (if, indeed, such a thing were possible), seemed to her dull, spiritless, monotonous, and bumpkin like. To marry, to settle, to grow stout, and at the last to be "*Jane, wife of the above, aged* 74. *Until the day break and the shadows flee away.*" Unthinkable prospect! But to float in the air through countless ages—a sight to inspire poets and make them swoon—that were a destiny worthy the name! She confided this opinion to De Boys, who agreed that it would be fine to swim in the winds; but he thought that a girl hanging on his neck would mar the gloriousness of the excursion. Such is the brutality of man at fourteen.

Quite early De Boys had shown a taste for learning, and had dreams very far removed from the walls, turnip-fields, and potato-beds of Up-at-Battle's. He held very pronounced views on literary style, and wrote numerous sermons in the manner of Gibbon, which Jane considered far superior to anything achieved by that historian himself. In gayer moments he attempted blank verse (in the Miltonic strain), and composed two acts of a tragedy—"Julius Cæsar in Britain"—in which Jane declared that Julius Cæsar sounded exactly like De Boys, particularly in a fine speech about women, which began, "*Hence, pampered minions, born of pride and folly,*" and ended, "*I scorn such soft-mouthed babblers.*" The third act (still unwritten) he assured her would be the most tremendous of the five.

His own observation, helped by hints from the neighbours, had taught him very soon that he was

living on charity, and a sense of gratitude to the Battles, no less than his own self-pride, filled him with a desperate ambition to be independent, and make a name. His father had been that sad anomaly, an accountant with a literary faculty; his mother was a poetess, who died in her effort to rhyme "love" with "drudgery." From both parents he inherited a desire for the vague, and a disgust for the tangible.

"Have you no pride?" he said to Jane one day, when she had seemed more amused than awed by his ambitious ideas.

"We must beware of pride," said Jane, who hoped she sounded humble.

"That is the right sort of pride—to feel that you come of honest people, and must bring no shame to them," said the boy, hotly. "I am not going to be the pauper of the family!"

"But you are a genius," said Jane. "How can you expect to be rich when you are a genius? I think you are very discontented."

De Boys sighed, but, remembering her good qualities as a fighter, pitied her weak sex and not her poor spirit.

Some months after the foregoing conversation, the curate of the parish, driven to his wits' end by the increasing wants of an increasing family, was inspired to offer young Mauden instruction in the Classics, in exchange for Miss Caroline's milk and butter. At first she had shrunk from this nefarious traffic in dairy produce and the Pagan authors, but no sooner had her common sense assured her that the plan was hugely to the lad's advantage, than she became as strongly convinced of its innocence as she had been of its

impiety. She soothed her father's unreasonable prejudices, which were not in disfavour of learning as learning, but of the time wasted in its acquisition. If, as she pointed out, De Boys worked at his books when the rest of the family were sleeping, and *if* the curate had no better equivalent than Latin and Greek to offer in exchange for food, and *if* he was too proud to accept it as a gift—— Her opening statement alone occupied forty-five minutes. Battle, who had set his face against De Boys "poking out his eyes wi' night work," and could find no words to express his mean opinion of the dead languages as weighed against fresh butter, relented at the first harrowing picture conjured up to his imagination, by Miss Caroline's ingenious hints of the curate's half-fed family. Her last mournful prophecy that the unhappy man's two girls would die of consumption before the year was out, and the baby have "rickets," was so soul-piercing, that the worthy farmer not only gave his consent to the bargain in debate, but even admitted, that the curate might not be a prophet in sheep's clothing of the type we are so expressly warned against in the Sermon on the Mount.

De Boys, whose burrs of knowledge picked up in the Town Library, and in the local "Academy for Young Gentlemen," had only served to tease alike his intellect and his spirit, saw a special Providence in the tutor, who was thus dropped, as it were, from heaven for his guidance. He hardly knew whither his thoughts and plans were leading him: the something ahead was so vague in outline, and so far away, that though he daily approached it nearer, it only seemed part of the general distance, the bit of high

mountain beyond many mountains, many roads and valleys. For the present he only knew he must work —work early and late, never despairing, yet never hoping too high—striving to do his best, but leaving it for others to say how good that best might be. Had he a talent, and was it the one he most coveted in the world?—Would he ever be a scholar? At last one day, between blushes and stammers, he asked his tutor whether—after thirty years or so of close application—he would know something. The Rev. Fitz Ormond O'Nelligan was one of those rare men, who, void of personal pretensions, are big with ambition for their friends. He slapped his pupil on the back with such force that had De Boys been a student of the weakling order, his earthly career would have ended on the spot.

"You will be the foinest Grecian in England," he said—"that is to say, if ye'll only be patient. At the Universitees now, the cry is all for mere lads, and a text which Bentlee would have approached with awe and riverince, and given the best years of his loife too, is now cobbled up by any schoolboy in six weeks or less. Avoid all such immoralitee. Fasten your oies on the gloreeous examples of the past, and if you are not noticed by this generation, there will be some roise up in the future, who will call your memoree blessed."

"What for?" said De Boys, who had fortunately mastered the art of grinning inside.

"For being the one scholar," said O'Nelligan, solemnly, "who had the humanitee to keep his wisdom out of print, and who did not regard the great masterpieces of antiquitee as so many door-

posts for every dog to defile. The simile is used by Erasmus."

This encouragement, delivered in O'Nelligan's most impressive manner (impossible to describe, and only to be imagined by those who may have encountered an Irishman with the blood of two kings, eighteen earls, and a Christian martyr in his veins), gave De Boys the self-confidence which he was too modest to assume on his own warrant. It must be owned, however, that his tutor's instruction was, though solid, excessively dull. The one consuming passion of O'Nelligan's life was grammar, and for his pupil's leisure moments he had invented a game on Comparative Syntax, which, in his judgment, transcended chess, and threw whist on its death-bed. Mauden felt, therefore, to his own dismay, a something not wholly unlike relief when, after three years of hard reading, the excellent man confessed that he had taught him what he could, and that the time was now come for him to show his mettle at the University. De Boys rushed home, and with characteristic impetuosity blurted out at the dinner-table that he was going to Oxford.

"What time do you start?" said the gentle Miss Caroline, who wondered whether his journey could have anything to do with the cow.

"To Oxford!" thundered his uncle. "To Oxford! This comes of listening to a curate's great swelling words of vanity. You know what the Apostle Paul saith, that those who *seemed* to be somewhat, in conference added nothing to him. Take heed by his experience. To Oxford! And what will you find there? The lust of the eye, the

pride of life, and the vain pursuit of vainer knowledge. The wise using their wisdom to confound the weak, working, not to the glory of God, but for the amazement of the sinner; each man a law unto himself, and all in conflict with the powers that be. Let me hear no more blether about Oxford!"

Having finished his harangue, which he had delivered with such fluency that Miss Caroline suspected it had long been prepared for some such crisis, he left the room. De Boys, a little pale but not less determined in expression, went about his usual afternoon employment, which, since it had all to do with the farm, made it seem as though "Up-at-Battle's" were, after all, the one reality in life, and his dream of a University career, a dream indeed, nay more, the very town of Oxford a figment of his imagination. At tea-time he did not feel hungry; he walked instead to his favourite peak on the cliff, and sat there, gazing gloomily at the dancing sea. He was roused by a tap on his shoulder: he turned and saw Jane.

II.

WHICH CONTAINS SOME SERIOUS VANITY.

JANE had started from her home with her hair in a plait, but the wind, her quick walking, and her natural impatience of restraint, had shaken it free, and it now hung, neither curled nor crimped, yet far from straight, in one lively, glimmering mass below her waist. Her gown was of white cotton, and was so clean that it still smelt of the ironing-board, and so outgrown that it did not reach her ankles by an inch,—perhaps more. The ankles, however, were innocent, and did not fear the light of day. A wide-brimmed hat concealed the upper part of her face, and only left visible the tip of a lift-upward nose, a round chin and a finely-cut, but still childish mouth. Her cheeks and throat, though delicate in grain, were well browned, and while by no means rustic in mien, she looked what indeed she was—a daughter of the sun and rain. Jane was not beautiful; or rather, there was too much strangeness in her beauty, to make her seem so at first sight: reddish hair and a dusky face make an odd combination. There was an atmosphere of strength and sweetness about her which swept over the heart-sick De Boys like a mountain breeze; he drew a long breath, and wondered at the change in the weather.

"It is time to go home," he said. She swallowed

her mortification: she had sought him in order to offer her sympathy.

"Why don't you go, then?" she said, as promptly.

He made several thrusts at the meek earth with his heavy walking-stick. "You know," he said, "your grandfather does not like you to be out late."

"I can fight my own battles," said Jane, tossing her head.

De Boys shrugged his shoulders, and tried to frown down his rising colour; he also turned on his heel and walked away.

"De Boys," she said, pursuing—"De Boys . . . I suppose you think I am a cat?"

"I hate cats," he said, evasively.

"Do you hate *me?*"

The pause which followed seemed borrowed from eternity. "I could hate you," he said; "but, as it happens, I do not."

"Do you think I am ugly? All the girls say I am a fright!" Her smile had a crook at each end: one signified amusement, the other contempt.

"I have never thought about your looks," said De Boys, with more honesty than discretion. "I suppose you are all right. But in any case I would never call you hideous!"

Jane had a longing to be thought pretty. Her ideal was the sweet portrait of a young lady (on porcelain) which hung in a photographer's window she knew of, and which represented a divine creature with blue eyes, pink cheeks, and blonde hair, waved and parted Madonna-wise. If she might only look like that! She had a fatal admiration for the conventional type angelic, being neither old enough nor

experienced enough to know, that holiness occasionally treads the human countenance on crow's feet.

"How do you like me best?" she said. "This way" (she showed her profile), "or *that* way?" (She looked him straight in the face.)

He gazed. "Are your eyes blue or brown?" he said: "in some lights they are brown, but that may be the effect of your lashes."

"I think," she said, "they are blue."

"They remind me of purple heather," said De Boys, with a certain dreaminess.

"Good gracious!" said Jane, blushing.

"And your mouth," he went on, warming to the subject, "is——"

"My mouth is a straight line," she said, sharply. "And now we must make haste!" She started ahead and began to hum. The first strains were a reminiscence of "Pleasant are Thy courts below," but, as the melody swelled, it found words which were De Boys's own, and which were these:—

"Love is a bubble,
Love is a trouble,
Love is a sigh,
And love is a grin.
Love is sweet honey,
Love is cold money,
Love is a lie,
And love is a sin.

Love is a jig—
So tread you a measure;
Love is a dirge—
So fill you with grief;
Love is bright wine—
To quicken your pleasure;
Love's the North Wind—
And Man the dead leaf."

This effusion had been rejected by the editor of the *Brentmore, Haddington, and Mertford Express* on the ground that it was "too reckless"; but Jane thought it extremely fine. Once, and only once in the course of her singing, she stole a glance at her companion.

De Boys was tall and straight, of careless but not awkward bearing. In countenance he looked like a cherub who had talked long hours with Puck—his expression was at once so subtle, so artless, and so discreet. A chuckle lurked in the deep recesses of his eye, but the imp rarely ventured to the surface. His nose had an eager and inquiring air, as though it were ever scenting for an undiscovered country; his beardless lips were pliant, and told his kind, pleasure-loving, and generous disposition.

He was the first to make a remark. "I have been thinking," he said, "what your mouth is like," he blushed—"it is like a kiss made incarnate."

"I hate kissing," said Jane, hurriedly. "I was not born under a kissing star. Kissing is silly."

"I fear it is," sighed De Boys.

"There is nothing to *fear*," said Jane. "But what does it mean, or what is the use of doing things which mean so little?"

"I think," said De Boys, trying to look unprejudiced, "kissing might mean a great deal if—if the people cared for each other."

"Have you ever kissed any one and meant a great deal?" said Jane, with anxiety.

De Boys glanced up at the sky. "The clouds are brooding," he said. "I would not wonder if it rained. No, it is not my custom to kiss women. I hate it quite as much as you do."

She seemed sceptical. "Ah," she said, "but men are different."

"How do *you* know," he said, quickly.

"I cannot say *how* I know it," she answered, "because I must have known it ever since I was born."

"Let us talk of something else," said De Boys.

"You began this. Kisses and all such nonsense never come into my head. I—I always skip the love-making in novels." She uttered this astonishing falsehood with cloudless eyes.

"Oh!" said De Boys.

"Why do you say 'oh'? I suppose you don't believe me. I do not care; if you wish to quarrel, quarrel. I will not say another word." She turned away her head, but De Boys heard the tears in her voice.

"Jane," he said, "I told you a lie just now. I once kissed Lizzie Cass, but it was very long ago."

"When?" said Jane.

"At the hay-making. She stood in my way, and, somehow—well, you know how these things happen!"

"No, I don't!" she said, with indignation.

"She isn't at all pretty; and it was only her ear! Your ears are like pink shells. But, unhappily, they never get in the way."

"I should hope not," said Jane; "I want no kisses spared from Lizzie Casses!"

"Then, if I had not——"

"But you have," she said, "and that ends it."

"It was months ago," murmured De Boys, "and I have changed since then. Life looks differently."

"After all," said Jane, "you were very honest to

own it. But as for Lizzie Cass, I always said she was a bold minx. She ought to be ashamed of herself!"

"Undoubtedly I was to blame. I ought not to have done it. I should have had more self-respect."

"Oh, well," said Jane, "it is a girl's part to behave herself. But whenever there is kissing, either at the hay-making or at any other time, I have noticed that it is always some girl who starts it."

"That," said De Boys, "may be true. But you are not like other girls."

"De Boys," she said, faintly; "please don't think I am better than I am. I deceived you just now; I did not mean——"

His face grew hard, his voice cold, his eye was dismayed. "Do you mean," he said, "that you have told me a lie? What was it about?"

"Oh, forgive me," she said, half crying; "I cannot think what made me say it. But it was not the truth—I do not always skip the love-making in novels."

He stalked on with darkened brows.

"You lied to me," he said; "it is the principle I am thinking of. I never thought you *could* lie—even for a good purpose."

"Jane put her lips together. "It was a little one," she murmured.

"Ah, but now I know you are at least capable of deceiving me, how can I ever trust you so absolutely again?" His voice had a mournful cadence.

"I don't know," she said; "but—*look* at me."

To look at her were fatal, and he knew it. He stared undaunted and with resolution right in front of him.

"Look at me!" she entreated.

"Why?"

"I want to see whether you are so angry as you sound."

"Angry is not the word," he said, "but grieved and disappointed. You were my Ideal."

She began to cry. "If you had told me I was your Ideal," she said, "I would have been more careful. It is so much easier to be ideal when you know that some one appreciates you."

Jane had not yet grasped the truth, that man is a spectacle for angels, and that he can carry his heroism, his noble sentiments, and his virtue into a wilderness, and still not feel that he is being heroic and sublime for nothing—a suspicion, however, which will assail him for more causes than he would care to count, if he look for mortal appraisement only. But love is two-headed egoism, and to Jane the Ideal meant De Boys's ideas.

She continued—"I do not want you to think me perfect; because I am not, and I could not be, even to please you. I am just like other girls."

"Well," said De Boys, at length, "perhaps I ought to be glad of anything that makes you more like me—that puts you nearer my level."

Jane looked troubled; she was beginning to realise, though dimly, the responsibilities of an Ideal.

"De Boys," she said, "did you ever think that I was better than yourself?"

"Better! It was not a question of comparison at all."

"And now," said Jane — "what do you think now?"

He hesitated. "And *now?*" she asked again. They had reached a gate which led into a kind of shrubbery. As she passed through her skirt caught on one of the spikes. He was awkward and slow at releasing her, and when they started to walk again, he lagged behind.

"Are you tired?" said Jane.

"No."

"Are you angry?"

"Yes."

"Very well; then we are not friends. But I would rather be so than have deceit between us. And you may as well know the worst of me at once. I am much plainer in the face than you think. Take a good look at me this way."

She pulled off her hat, tugged back her magnificent hair, and in her anxiety to appear at her worst, all but made a grimace. De Boys did not seem so repelled as she had expected.

"Take a good look," she repeated, faintly. "I shall never have the courage to do this again."

"I am angry," he said, looking, "because I hate myself and because you are still as far above me as——"

She advanced a step towards him. "I am not above you, De Boys," she said, "I am *here.*"

He needed no second reminder, but with the agility of a practised lover, caught her in his arms and kissed her at random, and with an ardour which, though wholly beyond the measure of her own childish affection, filled her with nameless fear.

"There!" he said; "but don't ask me to look at you again. That's kissing."

Jane fixed her eyes on his with something like reproach. "I was happier before," she said; "much happier. I almost wish you had not."

"But I love you," said De Boys.

"Still," said Jane, "I wish you had not. I shall remember it."

"So shall I," said De Boys.

"But I only want to remember that I love you," said Jane; "and I want to remember it without distractions, and without kisses, which, after all, may only mean that I am standing in your way."

"Dearest!"

"Yet I am glad," she went on—"I am glad God made me a woman."

"Why?"

"That you might love me."

Once more a spell was in the air, but this time she had experience.

"Come," she said, quickly, "we shall be late, and the geese will want their supper."

Even thus does prose trample on the skirts of passion. They hurried on into the gathering twilight, on and on. At the hill they joined hands and ran, kicking, in imagination, the world (of their imagination), in front of them as they went.

III.

TOUCHING THE MASCULINE CONSCIENCE AND THE FEMININE REASON.

FARMER BATTLE, meanwhile, had retired to the solitude of his own chamber, to review a domestic situation, which, as Miss Caroline had rightly guessed, he had foreseen, and to some extent prepared for. It may be, however, that he had overlooked the serious difficulties of the case, in the seemly joy of composing a speech which would crush it; at all events, he saw plainly enough now, that the trouble, so far from being ended, had only begun. The outlook perplexed, worried, and distressed him more than his dignity was willing, but as his nerves soon forced him, to admit. His first act, therefore, on reaching his room was to pour out and swallow a large dose of a noxious preparation known as *Gump's Elixir*, and, as he was able to gulp this down with comparatively few qualms, it assured him, that his system could still endure the most extraordinary and violent shocks without surrender.

But though he could recall the physical man to duty, his mind remained in rebellion, and he sat down, with his body forward, his arms resting on his knees, and his hands clasped, the picture of doubt and embarrassment. He was a man of governed but primitive emotions, and knew nothing of the thousand-and-

one complications and combinations, which the cultured mind can make out of one rough passion chopped into polished fragments. His love was love, and his hate was hate, and his rage was rage : to excite either one was like pulling out the stop of an organ.

Like most proud men he was extremely sensitive, and he had been quick to notice his nephew's want of interest in farm matters and the comfortable home—the home which Battle himself had spent his days in making, and which was the crown of his earthly labours. The old man did not desire—nor indeed could he conceive—a greater happiness than to stand in his porch, and see the smoke rising from his tenants' chimney-pots, to gaze at the fine barn (once a miserable cowshed), at the dairy, and at the model hen-house built after his own design, with a patent door ! Every twig and every stone on the estate had its value and association for him ; every inch of the ground knew his tread ; every corner, nook, and cranny stood for something in the sum of his experience. But De Boys could sit opposite the barn with his nose in a book ; he accepted the dairy as a matter of course ; he talked of crops and prize bullocks as though land which did *not* yield crops, and bullocks which did *not* win prizes were things unheard of ; he ate his good fare and slept between linen sheets, not with gratitude, but as though he would have been very scurvily treated if he did not have such luxuries.

All this was a never-failing source of bitterness to the old man : what he gave he gave liberally ; he only asked, when his gifts were accepted so freely, that he should be remembered with like readiness as

the giver. There was certainly nothing unreasonable in this desire; it was a very natural craving for some recognition of the toil and endeavour, the heart-aches and struggles which had gone to the making of his—as it must to every man's—success. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and if it is the weak and the slow who win, how is it done save by the most painful efforts, the sternest self-discipline, the most dogged courage, and the most touching patience? Battle, unable to analyze his feelings, was only conscious that he had fought a hard fight for sixty odd years, was still fighting, and not one member of his family showed, nor ever had shown, the smallest knowledge of it. The women he forgave, for two (his wife and his eldest daughter) were dead, one was a careful housekeeper, and the other, a slip of a girl, but De Boys—he could not forgive De Boys. That his experience was the common one of many husbands and fathers only aggravated the wound: he wished, in pardonable if foolish pride, to think that his family were altogether exceptional, patterns of goodness, sobriety, discretion and—quality so necessary to domestic comfort—obedience.

Much, no doubt, was to be said for the farmer, but De Boys was not without defence. He had appeared on the scene when things were prosperous, and he was still an untravelled youth of twenty; he was therefore quite unable to contrast the old farm with the new, or properly estimate a force of character which he could only know to be uncommon, by mixing with the world. In De Boys's green judgment all elderly relatives were severe, a shade despotic, and a little too religious; all women mended socks, made incomparable

pies, and scolded incessantly; all girls spent too much time *titivating*, were feeble in argument, yet pleasing enough in their way. These opinions he expressed with much confidence, and, boy-like, was so proud of his power of criticism, that he forgot he was directing it against the beings he loved best in the world. Boy-like, too, he was not only very shy of showing his affection, but he did not even know that he had it. Healthy-minded lads do not sit brooding over their instincts till they are hatched into Christian virtues and deadly sins: their conscience warns them which to follow and which to shun, but the why, the wherefore, and the psychological meaning of it all does not trouble them in the least. Thus, while De Boys would have defended his uncle with the last drop of blood in his body, he would not have been able to say just why. From this it will be seen, how far the farmer and the aspiring scholar were from a mutual understanding.

Battle's strongest impulse, after the scene at the dinner-table, was to order an immediate bonfire of all the Pagan authors in the house, and if it had been in his power to include the curate among them, it is not hard to guess how he would have dealt with that amiable gentleman. To think that De Boys should prefer the example of a weak-kneed parson (who could hardly keep his own body and soul together), before that of his lawful guardian, whose flourishing circumstances were the best possible proof of his fitness to advise! Yet De Boys was a clever lad, apt and well-spoken—if he liked books better than the fields, he had inherited the taste from his pitiable father. For a moment Battle wavered. If

he could call to mind one, even one, scholar who was able to show *gumption* at a crisis and keep a family in comfort, he would let the boy go his own gait. He was searching his experience for such a prodigy when a doubt assailed him: was not learning sinful? He consulted the third chapter of Genesis and read no further. Evidently, knowledge was not for man.

The farmer's relief was unbounded: he could not only make a virtue of his own ignorance, but stand opposed to his nephew on the vantage-ground of a great moral principle. He had a text—"*Ye shall not eat of it*"; he could not be held responsible for the hard sayings of Scripture, *his* only duty was to expound, and, when necessary, enforce them. His mind was fixed: he had settled the matter for ever—there should be no more weak relenting, no more teasing of conscience. He knelt down by his bed, and, thanking God for giving him light on the subject, was studiously careful not to ask Him for *more*: he even besought the Almighty to restrain his eyes from wandering to other texts, which might seem to contradict the sound doctrine of the one before him. He wound up by hinting, that if the Almighty saw fit to remove the Rev. Fitz Ormond O'Nelligan to another parish—or sphere—he (Samuel Battle) could only admire His divine wisdom and clemency. Strengthened and refreshed by this prayer, he rose from his knees, and, almost smiling, opened the door at which Miss Caroline had been softly tapping for some seconds.

"Well?" he said.

Miss Caroline studied his face with a half-fearful,

half-imploring expression. She had come to make intercession for young Mauden.

"I want to say something about the boy," she began. If the circumstances were ordinary, her heart, at all events, was heroic, and it is the heart which makes the situation.

"There is nothing to be said," said her father, sternly; "leave him to me. There has been enough of women's meddling as it is."

"I have a notion," she faltered.

"A notion! The whole house is swarming wi' notions. A man cannot sleep nor eat for them: they sour the milk and turn his bread to ashes; they confront him on his threshold and break in upon his converse with the Lord"—here he fixed his iron-grey eye on Miss Caroline—"they make his own flesh and blood a heaviness and his children's children as vipers!"

"The Lord forbid that a notion o' mine should work such mischief!" said Miss Caroline, drawing down her lip.

"I have no fault to find wi' you, Caroline," said Battle, in a milder tone, "but I do say that you ha' pampered that boy till he's fit for nought, but to sip tea wi' curates, and lose his liver seeking after lost Niobes!"

He had once overheard a brief conversation between O'Nelligan and Mauden, in the course of which they had referred to the lost Niobe of Æschylus. This mystery, Battle had no doubt, was a heathen god whom the world was all the richer for losing. "The difference," he went on, "so far as I can see between a man wi' notions and a man without 'em is this—*the man without 'em pays the bill!*"

"I see no harm in book-learning," said Miss Caroline, firmly; "we are told to add to faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and——"

Her father waved his hand. "Beware of twisting the Word of God," he said, hurriedly; "there's no telling what mischief may come of perking up on a false meaning. I don't hold wi' women quoting texts," he added, "and I doubt the wisdom of dragging Scripture in by the ears whether it will or no. Ten to one if it don't bite you for your pains!"

"Aye!" said Miss Caroline, "and for that reason ministers should have learning." She drew a long breath and flushed. "Why shouldn't De Boys be a minister?"

Battle plunged into thought. He never, in his own phrase, "fooled round the edge of an idea."

"A minister!" he said, at last. "What sort of a minister? If De Boys is the kind to be yanked about by deacons he hasn't much of the Battle stock in him!"

"There's room for all in the Church of England," said Miss Caroline. "A doctrine or two needn't stand in a man's way. What's doctrine? Why should De Boys call himself a Dissenter and spoil his chances, poor lad, when he might just as well be Broad and hold his own wi' the best? When folks begin to quarrel about doctrine they are really spearin' at politics. Any fool knows that!"

"I will think it over," said Battle; "but I could never see bone of my bone picked bare by deacons. Whenever I see a deacon I always think of the roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. Look at Hoadley

—a pleasant enough man till they made him senior deacon. There's very few men, Caroline, that can bear authority if they haven't been born with the shoulders for it. If you gave a man a nose who had never had one, he would be blowing it all day. If De Boys can see his way to do without deacons—well, I will think it over."

Miss Caroline went downstairs, scolded the dairy-maid on general grounds, called Jane to task for tearing her frock the Sunday before, hinted of dead parents turning in their grave, made a pudding with as little sugar as possible, and finally withdrew to her own room, where she indulged in a good cry. Heroism has a reaction.

Battle, however, had been so fascinated by the idea of De Boys entering the Church and "coming the Rectory" on his own account, that when his daughter had left him, he once more opened his Bible and found his thumb on the following sentence in Isaiah—"*Their strength is to sit still.*"

"The Lord's will be done," he murmured. "It is not for me to thwart the working of the Spirit. If the boy's call is to the ministry, he must obey it!"

It would be tedious to recapitulate the numerous consultations, plans, and hopes of which De Boys was the object, not only for days, but for weeks following. At first he had been tempted to quarrel with the profession so suddenly forced upon him: his religion, like the religion of the young, was an untried force, and, as his idea of God was somehow associated with his Uncle Battle, it was largely tempered with unutterable private opinions. But though he had often questioned

the infallible justice of the Almighty (with regard to fishing on Sundays and the like), his faith was so knit in his bones that it was more valuable as a ruling principle than any wider creed, based on the mere mental acceptance of doctrinal truths. The fear of God was before his eyes ; the prospect, therefore, of becoming His minister put no strain on his sincerity. If it failed to stir his enthusiasm it was because his easy-going nature hung aloof from the self-denial and hard work which, oddly enough, he conceived to be a clergyman's portion.

Where his books had formerly been ordered aside for the most trivial domestic duty, he was now frowned at if he ventured to look up from them ; if he showed the smallest disposition to levity, the farmer would remind him that it was time to put away childish things and reflect on the dignity of his calling : at his approach gossip was silenced, and Baptismal Regeneration, Predestination, and Justification by Faith became the lively topics of conversation; if he betrayed even the mildest interest in "new trouserings," references would be made to Demas, who loved the things of this world, and to the young man who had great possessions. He began to see that a reputation for virtue and wisdom (however gratifying to one's vanity), brings with it pains and penalties so various, so exquisite, and so incessant, that Job himself would seem a false type of persecuted excellence, since he lived longer than his plagues. De Boys's patience, at no time of remarkable endurance, would not have lasted under the petty but fretting annoyances which now formed his daily lot, and which promised to grow in severity as he advanced in grace, if his determination

to go to Oxford had not been made with a firm resolve to suffer all things rather than fail to fulfil it. When the time came to leave home, he went with a sigh of relief so heartfelt, that Miss Caroline mistook it for a sob.

"The plum-cake is just inside the bag," she whispered, "but the currant wine is at the bottom of the box. I didn't put it on top because—as you are going to be a minister—it would not look well if the lid flew open!"

He heard no more, for the driver whipped up his horse, and, followed by tears, blessings, exhortations, and warnings, he rode off in the market cart towards fame and the railway station. He was so lost in fair dreams of the future that he did not notice Jane, who, by running across the fields and jumping a few ditches, had managed to reach a certain tree which commanded a fine view of the high-road. This she had climbed, and there she sat on a branch waiting for him to pass.

But while he did not see her for dreaming, she could not see him for tears. Thus her long run, and her jumps, and her climb were for nothing.

De Boys, however, had wished her farewell the night before, and he had felt the parting to the best of his ability. He still felt it—dear, sweet little Jane! (she was tall)—but now other matters were naturally foremost in his mind. Jane, woman-like, utterly unable to understand this, thought him very unloving, and decided to waste no more of her affection where it was not wanted. She was young—but seventeen in fact, impulsive, wilful, passionately fond of romances, but singularly practical in her criticism of life: weeping for her heroines as heroines, yet scorning them

not seldom as fools, admiring the heroes, yet finding much to be said for the villains, and displaying, for her age, sex, and inexperience, an unusual desire for strict —indeed rigorous—justice. Even now, smarting under De Boys's fancied indifference, she blamed her own poverty of attractions, not his callousness, which, since she promised—to the seeing eye—to be a beautiful woman, was as wrong-headed and feminine as it well could be.

As the days dragged on she realized how much De Boys had been to her, how much of her supposed independence had rested on his support, how much her courage had fed on his sympathy, how everything in her mind which gave her the smallest satisfaction was not her own at all, but borrowed from him. And now he was gone, it seemed as though the earth which she trampled on as a right, had suddenly slipped away, and left her without a footing, to sink, and sink, and sink, as one does in a nightmare. At first she saw a substitute for De Boys in a tow-headed youth who sang in the chapel choir, and she talked to him of the books she read, as she would to her lover, only to grow absent-minded, however, and wake to catch an unsympathetic and wondering eye: phrases, jokes, and little words full of meaning to herself and De Boys lost all their point when exchanged with her few friends in the village, and very soon she learnt the absolute dissimilarity in minds, and how very little except weakness one human being has in common with another.

Jane had always found such balm for all her small troubles in being understood by De Boys, which meant, no doubt, that he saw no fault in her, and

made a grace out of every shortcoming—that is to say, where her shortcomings affected others. He made nicer distinctions in her offences against himself. But in her dealings with the world at large he always proved her in the right, even when she knew herself in the wrong, and thus when she least agreed with him, he was most consoling. True, now he was absent, he wrote to her, but the letters were for family perusal, and even though "*Do not forget the guinea-pig*," stood for "*My very dearest, how I long to see you*," it was a flimsy substitute for a love-letter, her own, and bristling with "dearests" in plain English. Gradually restraint showed itself in her replies: the guinea-pig untimely died, De Boys adopted a more learned tone, Jane found him more difficult to answer, she doubted whether she loved him, and grew pale at the doubt; spent whole hours trying to prove that she was perfectly happy without him, and whole nights crying because she was not.

When she heard that he did not intend to return home till the end of his third term, she made no comment, but brought her lips so sharply together, that they lost their look of childish indecision for all time.

IV.

IN WHICH ONE LADY TRIES NATURE, WHILE TWO, DISCUSS HUMANITY.

ONE afternoon, in the following long vacation, a lady was gathering honeysuckle from a hedge in a field near St. Albans. She wore a pink cambric *confection*, artfully relieved with old Honiton: with one hand she held up her skirt and discovered a most elaborate silk petticoat; on the ground by her side was a lace parasol and a pair of long kid gloves. A hat, garnished with velvet orchids and silk dandelions, shaded her face, and was tied under her chin with pale green ribbons; her hair, which was black and very abundant, was loosely caught up by a silver comb. In figure she was tall and gracious, but one could have wished that her hips had more of a jut and her shoulders less an air of almost masculine resolution. She had too much distinction to be fashionable and too much style to be stylish: beyond any doubt she was a personage.

She had filled her basket with the flowers when her eyes fell on a fine spray just beyond her reach. The branch of a tree hung over the hedge, and, by supporting herself on this, she thought it might be possible to clutch at the prize. She was about to spring, when she was startled by the sight of a young man running towards her from the adjoining paddock.

Unobserved, he had been watching her for some indefinite space of time.

"Pardon me," he said, lifting his hat, "but I fear you do not see that the bough is broken."

"No," she said, with a baffling smile, "I only saw the honeysuckle!"

He looked at her, knit his brows, bit his lips, and then laughed. "So you only saw the honeysuckle," he said; "your point of view is magnificent!" He had not intended to speak so familiarly, but she reminded him so strangely, yet with so little reason, of a certain Jane Shannon he knew of, that he felt they were already well acquainted. The lady, however, unaware of her resemblance to Jane Shannon, gave him a severe look.

"I never thought I could meet any one," she said; "I did not know that there was any one in Whetstone to meet. Besides, this is not the high-road." There was a note of haughtiness in her tone, and her large black eyes wandered, apparently by chance, to a large notice which faced them both—"*Trespassers will be Prosecuted.*"

"I am a stranger here," said the youth, flushing; "they told me at the station that I could get to The Cloisters by crossing these fields. I saw you were in danger, so I spoke."

He took off his hat and turned ever so slightly to go on. When a man is at most pains to conceal his admiration for a woman, he can be most sure that she appreciates his struggle to her finger-tips. The lady instinctively pushed back her hat, and gave him a longer, perhaps a kinder, glance; he remained.

She had a face of such spiritual liveliness that its

merely natural charms of feature and colouring, only seized on second thoughts. They were the thin veil over a sparkling radiance, which, whether it were due to virtue, or wit, or coquetry, was too dazzling for Speculation—aged twenty-one and a son of Adam.

"Did I understand you to say," she said, "that you were on your way to The Cloisters?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Then you must be De Boys Mauden." (He bowed.) "I am Sophia Jenyns."

"What!" he exclaimed, "the new Lady Macbeth?"

"The newest," she said, drily. "You must know," she continued, wondering at Mauden's extreme astonishment, yet pleased, for she could translate all things into flattery—"you must know that I came out to gather honeysuckle this afternoon, because I wanted to see whether I would be happier if I were more like the primitive woman. Every one is talking about nature, so I thought I would try it. I have been so bored: I longed to be at home reading Hardy, or St. Augustine, or Hegel, or *somebody*."

"Do you read Hegel?" he said.

"I read everything," she replied, "don't you?"

"No," he said, and looked gratefully at heaven.

This young lady who was so far from philosophy that she tried nature, and so far from nature that she longed for philosophy, chuckled and picked up her flower-basket.

"You Oxford men," she said, "are more proud of what you have *not* read than of what you *have* read. Come, we can walk to The Cloisters together. I hope you like Lady Hyde-Bassett as well as I do."

"I should like her better if I thought she had

a heart: no woman with a heart could have married Sir Benjamin."

"Did you know him?" said Sophia.

"No," said De Boys; "but every one says he was the most disagreeable man in the world; so forbidding and curt and unapproachable."

"I thought so once," said Sophia, "till one day, when I was a child, I heard him talking to Lady Hyde-Bassett. I suppose they thought I was too little to understand them. They were walking in the garden and he asked her whether she would rather be a pussy cat or a catty puss, and she pinched his arm, and said he was a good little thing, and it was a pity that some of the old fossils he knew could not hear him. And he said, very solemnly, 'God forbid!' and she kissed his hand and said he was an angel, but she wished he would buy a new hat, although he could only look lovely if he wore pyjamas and a billy-cock! And he said, 'For God's sake, don't talk so loud!' and she said, 'Let us both say Damn with all our might, and then I will be quiet.' And they said Damn, and she was quiet, and then they began to talk about Aristotle. That," she wound up, "is a real celebrity really At Home. So you see all scholars do not talk like Casaubon in 'Middlemarch'; they have their flippant moments, and get horribly tired of being great!"

No written account of Miss Sophia Jenyns's artless prattle could convey her melodious voice, grace of gesture, dramatic force, and facial expression. De Boys watched her, entranced; it was his first direct encounter with spontaneous genius. And then her fatal, too delicious resemblance to Jane! he could

adore her for that alone. She led the way and he followed: a Will o' the Wisp would have been a safer guide.

Lady Hyde-Bassett was an American by birth, and had received her education in France. After much travelling and many flirtations she had married, at the age of two-and-twenty, the distinguished invalid and philologist, Sir Benjamin Bassett.

The *Hyde* was an inspiration attached to a small property which he had inherited towards the close of his last illness. The marriage had been eminently happy, but before the Society of Antiquaries had ceased to wonder at the devotion of so young and modish a woman to the apparently grim, the certainly middle-aged, and, by inference, dull hieroglyphic, he died. His widow's grief was of the desperate order, but, possessing ample means, she was able to wreak it by building a marble tomb over his bones, and founding a Hyde-Bassett Scholarship for Greek Verse. To perpetuate the deceased gentleman's tolerant and unprejudiced temper she also endowed, with equal generosity, a Roman Catholic School, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, and a Mission for the Suppression of Secret Societies. When pressed to give her reason for subscribing to the latter, she said that Sir Benjamin, to his sorrow, had belonged to one. "But," she added, "the rest is silence." With accomplishments which only wanted an occasion to reorganize Europe—or destroy it—she preferred to live in retirement and make matches, comparable only to Diocletian, who found (if we may believe him) greater happiness in planting cabbages than in ruling the Empire of Rome.

Her country house, known as "The Cloisters, near St. Albans," was, as it were, a home of rest for the most eminent in science, politics, art, and literature of her day, for, from her intimate knowledge of one genius, she never committed the error of making them seem common, by entertaining more than one—of his particular sphere—at a time. The distinguished person, therefore, who accepted her hospitality, never laboured under the unspeakable apprehension of encountering either his nearest match, or worse, his horrid better.

Now while Miss Sophia Jenyns, of the *Parnassus*, was gathering honeysuckle, her ladyship was reading "The Logic of Hegel." The room in which she sat was large, and breathed a sweet odour of peace and good housewifery. Its furniture, hangings, and decoration, though rich, were of a modest and even severe character, forasmuch as the cushions, coverings, footstools, screens, lamp-shades, photographs, and gew-gaws appurtenant to a modern boudoir were comfortable and pleasing by their absence.

"*Man is evil by nature,*" she read, "*and it is an error to imagine that he could ever be otherwise. To such extent as man is and acts like a creature of nature to that extent his whole position and behaviour is wrong. Nature is for man only the starting-point which he must transform to something better. The theological doctrine of Original Sin is a profound truth.*"

She sighed, and looked up from her book to gaze into a small silver-framed mirror which stood on the table by her side. Her complexion was pale, her eyes brown, and her hair prematurely grey. Some of her lady friends said they *believed* she thought she looked like Marie Antoinette. Her years were thirty-five,

but a life of assiduous self-discipline and self-culture (glorified selfishness, in fact) had given her the calmness and dignity associated with the idea—if not the reality —of old age. A woman so finished in manner, dress, and bearing could only be called artificial in comparison with the ordinary type, in the sense that one might so describe a sonnet as differing from a folk-song.

Meanwhile, the leaves of Hegel were fluttering. Margaret, with a sigh, wrenched her eyes from the mirror and fastened them once more on "Original Sin." But again she read no further, for a lady entered the room.

Miss Bellarmine was not a maiden lady of that pathetic type who pour out tea and who have once loved. She was tall and of commanding appearance: her figure was considered purely Greek. (Perhaps this was because she had the good taste to drape it with Parisian millinery of modern date.) She had really beautiful features if one examined them separately, but as a whole they appeared out of drawing, as though they had been picked off various antique divinities, and stuck on her face at random. Thus, her nose began too soon, and her mouth ended too late; whilst her eyes, charming in colour and shape, were so placed that they offered one a constant temptation to shift them either higher or lower. Her expression was neutral, for her character, like that of many Englishwomen, slumbered behind her countenance like a dog in its kennel, to come out growling or amiable as circumstances might demand. She was highly accomplished, and spoke five languages with one well-bred accent. Theology was her recreation, but Villon the serious study of her life. Her notes on this poet promised

to be the most exhaustive possible, and "Bellarmine on Villon," it was said, would be read like Coke on Lyttleton, as much for the commentary as the text.

"I am so glad to find you alone," she said. "Sophia Jenyns has gone out for what she calls a prowl, and Wrath is playing Bach in the music-room. What a gifted man! What *is* the relationship between them, dear? I have heard every impossible explanation."

Eliza Bellarmine was a discreet, cold-blooded person who could meet Nature face to face without blushing, and wink at the frailties of Culture. Lady Hyde-Bassett, on the other hand, would only see evil where she wished to see it: when she met unpleasant truths she rode off on what she called her instincts, and they carried her like Barbary mares. She did not reply to her friend's question immediately.

"There is no truth in the story," she said, at last.

"I have heard," said Miss Bellarmine, "that there is more than truth—there are diamonds!"

"I thought, Eliza, you were above such littlenesses! Sophia Jenyns is the most pure-minded woman I know. She is not like other geniuses—she is different."

"They are all different—with a sameness. I have known thirty, and they were all pure-minded, and had, at least, three husbands and an episode!"

"We must not judge them," murmured her ladyship; "they are so fascinating, and their husbands are always so brutal."

"The artistic temperament," said Miss Bellarmine, in measured tones—"the artistic temperament is only faithful for the purposes of local colour—to *experience* fidelity, in fact. Then the next step is to gain some

insight into infidelity. Unless a genius is extremely religious she is foredoomed to impropriety!"

"Eliza," said Lady Hyde-Bassett, "you have neither humour nor imagination."

"None," said that lady, with conscious pride.

"And yet you are editing a poet!"

The commentator smiled, which the poet, could he have been present, would not have done.

"But," said Miss Bellarmine, who never left a subject unsifted, "you have not explained the relationship."

"Wrath adopted Sophia when she was only four days old: her father committed suicide, and her mother died when she was born. I blush for human nature when I hear a man so maligned for a kind action. He must have been very poor at the time, for he had only just sold his 'Antigone.'"

"I know all that," said Eliza; "and it was very noble on his part, and all the rest of it. But Sophia is no longer four days old!"

"If they cared for each other, is there any earthly reason why they should not marry?"

"Certainly. He may have a lunatic wife locked away somewhere, or, in his extreme youth, he may have married some low person who is too respectable to divorce: nothing is more likely. I am very sorry for Sophia Jenyns, and more sorry for him; but I think they should either be frank, or separate. If they think they are wrong, they should bid each other good-bye, but if they feel they are right, they should have the courage of their opinion. I could respect them then, although I might disagree with their conscience. As it is—well, they evidently know they are

doing wrong, since they dare not be candid. And they must be wretched! He is far too honest a man not to be miserable in a false position."

"I have listened, dear," said Lady Hyde-Bassett, "because your sentiments are so excellent. But—first swear you will never tell!"

"I cannot give my word blindly."

"Then I will not tell you."

"Have I ever betrayed your confidence?"

"Never," said her ladyship; "but—this is a most profound secret."

"In that case perhaps you ought not to repeat it."

"You are so aggravating, Eliza! Shall I tell you?"

"That is a matter for your own judgment."

"Never breathe it to a soul! Wrath and Sophia have been married for two years."

"You astonish me," said Eliza, at last, but without moving a muscle—"you astonish me greatly. . . . But I am inexpressibly relieved to hear it. . . . Any children?"

"No," said Lady Hyde-Bassett; "so it could not have been on that account. . . . But now," she went on, "we must talk of something else: it would be very awkward if either of them came suddenly in. Have I told you about De Boys Mauden? He has just won my scholarship: a most brilliant young fellow; they say he will be another Porson. But he has been overworking, and the doctor has insisted on his taking a rest. So I have made him come here. I sent the brougham for him, but he told Biffin he preferred to walk. He cannot know the way, and,

manlike, would probably rather perish than ask any one to direct him!"

"I shall be most interested to make his acquaintance—most interested. I know his name quite well." She did not as a matter of fact, but as a matter of principle a commentator and an occasional contributor to the learned reviews, could not be ignorant of the existence of a future Porson.

"He is very handsome," said her ladyship; adding, after a pause, "when he has got his degree I shall let him revise and augment all Benjamin's unpublished manuscripts. I began them myself, but my Greek is too Homeric!"

"Mr. Mauden," announced the footman.

V.

IN WHICH A LADY HAS A TANTRUM, AND A GENTLEMAN PLAYS A FUGUE.

SOPHIA JENYNS had parted company with De Boys in the hall, and was now hurrying towards the music-room, where Wrath was playing a fugue in masterly style. But Sophia was in no mood for harmony. She burst open the door, flounced in, and put her arms round her husband's neck.

"Tom," she said, "I have been reconsidering what you said this morning about making our marriage public. I know myself so well that I am sure I could never love you again if you did. There is not a correct bone in my body: it would kill me to be called Mrs. Wrath—simply kill me. I adore you and worship you and idolise you, although you are my husband. That I cannot help; but to let other people know it—oh, intolerable! I will *not* be a British matron. I will *not* be called virtuous. It is no one's business whether I am married or not—a lot of fussy, prying, evil-minded old women—let them talk! I think of them when I say, '*I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry*'—no wonder I make the whole house creep! Buh! And, Tom—you fascinating, lovely, wonderful creature, I have just been flirting with all my might, and by to-morrow I shall be madly in love! Compared with you he is a

monster, but in your absence he does very well. He is already quoting Spenser, and his voice is agreeable. Tell me you worship me, and I will tell you the rest!"

"Why don't you flirt with me, dearest, and leave these young fellows to their work?"

"My soul," said his wife, "my heart of hearts, you are the dullest person to flirt with I ever met. I never flirted with you in my life: I half-tried it once by pretending to love you. But I found it too easy to pretend—hence our hideous, inartistic marriage certificate! Never refer to it if you have any regard for my self-respect."

"Sophia, seriously——"

"I will not be glared at, nor frowned at! How handsome you are! If you were not my husband I would elope with you to-morrow. What a mercy I met you before I saw any one else. If I had met you too late—oh, if I had met you too late——" She paused. "I am afraid I would not have called it too late!"

"This is all very pretty," said Wrath, "and you are, no doubt, very adorable. But you must behave yourself; other people do not understand you as I do."

He was about eight-and-forty, and looked older. His features, though fine, were irregular; his poetic brow, his large and eminently practical nose, the unrest in his dark eyes, and the stillness about his mouth betokened him the possessor of an unusually complex disposition. He was an extremely handsome man, yet such was his simplicity, that not all his wife's flatteries could convince him that he was other than plain. The

absence of personal vanity in an eminently self-conscious age, when every hero sings his own epic, had the curious effect of making many people accept him at his own estimate: they argued, from their own experience, that a person who was not his own greatest admirer could not possess admirable characteristics.

"But seriously," he said, secretly enjoying his wife's brilliant, ever-varying countenance—from the artistic point of view she was a constant joy—"quite seriously. You must be guided by my knowledge of the world. I must announce the marriage, and so put an end to this revolting gossip!"

"Revolting gossip does not matter: only facts are fatal—simply disastrous. Do not expose me to the humiliation of being publicly branded as an honest woman!"

His mouth twitched: there was always too much sadness in Sophia's jesting to make it downright laughable.

"While people can talk about us," she went on, "we give them an opportunity to show their charitable view of human nature, and so they encourage us; but if they once knew the truth, no one would care to see me act, and your pictures would be called dull, I know!"

"Where," he said, "do you learn this cynicism? It afflicts me beyond words: it is utterly false, utterly corrupt, utterly disgusting. You certainly do not hear it from Lady Hyde-Bassett."

She glanced at him swiftly, and as swiftly glanced away. He had coloured a little—no doubt from annoyance.

"Lady Hyde-Bassett has not lived my life," she

said, catching her breath; "she was not a born pauper! Her father was not starved out of his wits, and her mother did not dance herself to death for a pound a week."

"Sophia!"

"Oh, I know you have always been very kind to me. I am not ungrateful."

"Do you talk of gratitude—to *me?*"

"I will talk of anything I like to anybody! . . . Have you asked Margaret to sit for the Madonna?"

"I have asked her to give me a sitting or two—yes. But it is merely for the shape of her face: it would not be a portrait. Pray be careful how you refer to the matter, because I was studiously careful to explain that I could not paint the Madonna from any woman in the world. It merely struck me that Marg—— that Lady Hyde-Bassett's face was peculiarly——"

"Fiddlesticks!"

"If you are going to be peevish, I think we had better not talk."

"You are very unkind to me. And I have a frightful headache: I can hardly see. I am sure this place is unhealthy. . . . I was only thinking, why trouble Margaret to sit, if you are *not* going to make the picture like her? What would be her object in sitting?—she might as well be a lay-figure at once. I am afraid she will feel insulted."

"She seemed to perfectly realize what I meant, and was very amiable about it."

"Naturally! She could hardly let you see that she was annoyed—in her own house, and when you are a guest! . . . Why can't I sit for you?"

"Your type, you know, dearest, is — is not conventionally religious. You are most beautiful, but——"

"I would do very well, I suppose, for the Woman taken in Adultery!"

"I have never seen you like this before."

"Perhaps not. Thank God, I don't sit with my mouth screwed in one perpetual simper, looking religious, and wondering whether my new gowns will fit! I want you to understand that I have got a soul! and a mind! and individuality!"

He sighed and returned to his playing; but there was no spirit in his performance.

"You are not to tell Margaret of our marriage," said Sophia, suddenly; "when I get ready, I will tell her myself."

He flushed again, and this time more decidedly. Unfortunately, he had informed her ladyship of his happy condition that very afternoon—in a burst of friendly confidence—after she had promised to sit for the Madonna. Could the circumstances be more awkward?

"Do you think she suspects?" said Sophia. But women have a fatal genius for answering their own questions. Before her husband could reply she went on, "I do not see how she can; I have always been very careful."

"Sophia," he began, intending to make a clean breast of the matter, "the fact is——"

She stamped her foot—a beautiful foot, too, another artistic joy. "I *loathe* facts; I will have my own way about it. You promised me that I could keep it a secret as long as I wished."

"I know that," he replied, "but you said this morning——"

"I am always being told what I said this morning! Never mind what I said six hours ago: it is the afternoon now. I suppose I may change my mind."

"But," he said, "I am heartily sick of all this absurd mystery. I—I am rather proud. I cannot explain it, but it affects your honour. These reports you find so amusing are gross insults. I was mad to make such a fool's promise."

"No," said Sophia, "you were not mad, you were in love with me, that's all. You have promised anything!" It was most indiscreet to remind him of this mournful truth. Wrath received it with sublime (if highly coloured) indignation.

"I was never *in love* with you," he replied, angrily. "I detest the phrase. Wife to me is a sacred name. . . . But few women understand a man's best feelings, and least of all on the subject of love. They do not realize that even the vilest of us would *rather* think that the woman he loves is a bit of divinity. . . . But it is very seldom that she will let him think so —very seldom. . . . Are we quarrelling?" he said, abruptly; "once I thought we could never quarrel. This is terrible!"

"This," she said, "is marriage!"

"You speak as though you regretted——"

"You recognize regret as though you were long acquainted with it!" A woman always handles sarcasm with the point towards her own breast. Sophia turned pale at her own words.

"You *do* regret," she said.

"I regret anything that makes you unhappy."

"This is equivocation: you never did speak out and you never will. A man so guarded in his words must have very treacherous thoughts. Why do you look at me like that?" she said, passionately. "I repeat, you are very difficult to understand. I have been with you ever since I was born, and I have always done all the talking!" He did not attempt to deny this, but still kept his eyes on her with the patient, touching, and wistful expression of the collie dog in "The Shepherd's Chief Mourner."

"One has to take you on trust or not at all," continued his wife; "the most exasperating man God ever made! It is a most unfortunate thing that we ever met: you are naturally secretive, and I am naturally suspicious. Why did you not let them take me to the workhouse? And why did you make love to me? You know you did: I cannot remember one single word you ever said, but you have got an artful way of implying everything under the sun without uttering a syllable! You never even asked me to marry you: all I know is, that I am married and I wish I wasn't." And she wept. Sophia never exhausted herself by restraining her emotions; tears now sprang to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks so softly and sweetly, that to see her one would have thought that weeping were as easy as breathing. It was a pretty study in highly cultivated sorrow.

"My dearest," said Wrath, "you are not well. But this is all my fault: I have been a beast. How can you like such a great, clumsy, ill-natured brute? It is a very flimsy excuse, but I think I worked too long this morning. Margaret was reading aloud and I did not like to——"

"What was she reading?" said Sophia.

"Some new novel: I forget the title, but," he added, "the cover was green!"

"What was it about?"

He grabbed at the opportunity to amuse her, and detailed the plot with elaborate care—drawing however rather from his imagination than his memory. The result was an adaptation of "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," "Wilhelm Meister," and "Gil Blas." He might have made some fame as a novelist.

When he had finished, Sophia coughed. "How well you remember it," she said; "you must have listened very attentively!"

Then, remarking that she felt better, she left him. He heard her singing "I know that my Redeemer liveth" as she went up the stairs, and rejoiced that he had cured her headache, and could resume his fugue.

So little do men know their wives.

VI.

IN WHICH A LADY LOOKS GRATEFUL.

WRATH had been playing in ineffable contentment for some thirty minutes, when the door was opened softly and Lady Hyde-Bassett walked in. Her gait was peculiar—not goddess-like, defiant, and untrammelled in the manner of Sophia, but agreeably suggestive of moneyed leisure, a certain feminine timidity, and clinging draperies. She was already dressed for dinner, and was looking her best in violet silk and amethysts. Here it may be a fitting opportunity to mention that she was ever attired in beautiful garments: "How can I make myself a fright," she told Eliza Bellarmine, "when I know that my dearest is watching me from heaven? It would make him so unhappy to see me growing dowdy!" Which, Eliza thought, would have been impious had it not been American.

Margaret and Wrath had known each other for many years. She had often given him motherly advice in his attempt to bring up Sophia (who was her junior by some ten birthdays), and their friendship, which had been somewhat solemn during Sir Benjamin's lifetime, was now stepping the enchanting measures of an intellectual jig. It may be that if Lady Hyde-Bassett had not vowed perpetual widowhood, and if Miss Jenyns had not suddenly grown

from a tiresome schoolgirl into a maddening but all-compelling woman—— but why dwell on might-have-beens? Wrath, however, had very nearly loved her once, and as he was not a man who cast his affection on what was unlovely, where he bestowed it, there it remained. He was quite conscious that he had a kind regard for Margaret, but the difference between that kind regard and his overmastering, limitless devotion to his wife was so immeasurable that it never even occurred to him to compare them. One woman occupied his life, and the other an occasional thought, and even that thought would be, as it were, a ripple on a whole ocean of Sophia.

"It is wicked to interrupt you," said her ladyship, as she entered, "but I must steal a moment just to tell you about my new genius—young Mauden."

"A new genius?" he said, lifting his eyebrows.

"I am not overrating him, I assure you. *Once* you had more confidence in my judgment!"

"Naturally," said Wrath. "That was when *I* was your new genius."

"Ah, why refer to my past follies?" said Margaret, which was certainly an adroit way of suggesting them. She was a coquette before she was a widow.

"I own," he said, "it is not pleasant to be reminded of one's mistakes."

"I never mistook *you*," she murmured: "I was only mistaken in myself."

"I can remember," he began—"I can remember——"

"Do not remind me," said Margaret. She was wondering how she could ever have allowed herself to even vaguely contemplate the impossible possibility

of marrying again. It was her only consolation to think, that for at least six months after Sir Benjamin's death she had not been in her perfect mind : chaos was come and the reign of irresponsibility. "It wanted a Shakespeare," she thought, "to make the Lady Ann accept Richard III. over her husband's coffin : it must have been then or never!"

"Do not remind me," she said again.

"Is it only men who should have the burden of remembering?" said Wrath, surprised at his unusual power of repartee, and deciding that it was inspired by the twilight.

"I remember too well too many errors," she sighed.

"Ah!" said he, "women only confess the sins they have left *un*done!"

"It was a man who prayed for a talent of forgetting!"

"He prayed in vain," said Wrath, now thoroughly exhausted and wishing to Goodness that Sophia would come in and "do the talking." Half-unconsciously he turned an ivory button in the wall, and lo! the room was illuminated by the discerning beams of the electric light.

"What a useful invention!" he exclaimed.

"Most useful!" said her ladyship, no less heartily.

"By the bye," he said, "Sophia has retracted her promise that I might announce our marriage. She is sublime! As she is suffering from neuralgia," he went on, "I did not tell her——"

"I will be as silent as the grave," said Margaret, divining his whole difficulty at a guess.

He could only gaze his gratitude, admiration, and

wonder. "I never tease her when she is studying a new part," he explained; "she is much too sensitive to be able to do good work under the stress of annoyance. And to a woman of her nervous temperament a small fret is more distressing than a serious calamity: her patience is too mighty for trivialities. Paper boats cannot sail in the north wind!" He smiled, and was evidently fully alive to what the world called the *cussedness* of the divine Sophia: only he did not call it cussedness; it was to him the last magnificent touch to her colossal spirit.

"But when *do* you try her patience?" said Lady Hyde-Bassett. "If every woman of genius had such a husband! I do not wonder that she worships the ground you walk on: that is a secret which she cannot keep. Oh, when a man is unselfish, no woman—not even the best—can compare with him. Splendid! splendid! I have only known one man like you, and that was Sir Benjamin." The sudden remembrance of her own desolation was so afflicting that her eyes filled with tears.

"Do not mention us in the same breath," said Wrath; "you know what I think about him."

It had been his appreciation for Sir Benjamin which had assailed her heart so perilously in what we call the If period. "It is such a comfort to me," she said, "to know that at least one of my husband's friends had some conception of the man apart from his attainments. I must have loved him, if he had only been a sausage-seller!"

It was, no doubt, very touching, and perhaps an occasion when her ladyship could throw an affectionate glance at her guest with perfect propriety.

But Sophia, who happened to come into the room at that moment, and who had not heard the preceding remark, did not understand it.

"Oh," she said, lightly, "I am looking for young Mauden. Such an intelligent boy! I promised to show him the conservatory."

Without looking at Wrath—or at least, without appearing to look, for we may be quite sure that she had nicely observed every line of his countenance—she wheeled round and went out.

"How lovely she looks in that yellow *crêpe!*" said Margaret, not enviously, yet with a sigh. "It is nice to be young!"

Wrath felt that it would ill become him to be unreservedly enthusiastic on the subject, seeing his close relation to the lady. But he walked to the door and watched the incomparable creature sail down the corridor.

As he went upstairs to dress for dinner, he wondered what he had done to deserve the love of such a woman, and, lest any cynical reader should assume that so excellent and kind-hearted a man was thanking Heaven for a blessing which he did not possess, let us hasten to add that Sophia was no less often astonished, on her part, that she was blessed with such a husband. For, to do her justice, she knew his strength and her own weakness: if he indulged her beyond reason, the fact was due to his magnanimity and not her superior will. He might have crushed her but did not. Hence, his charm.

But on that particular afternoon Sophia's heart was usurped by feeling very unlike gratitude: vague anger, clear discontent, and motherless desperation—the three

witches of a woman's soul—were doing their best to work mischief. To be suspicious of Margaret was unfriendly ; to distrust Wrath was something not very far removed from base—so kind a husband, so devoted a lover, so upright a man—yet she could not forego the luxury of a grievance. Besides, in spite of all argument, common sense, and justice, she really was jealous.

Why should her husband paint Margaret Hyde-Bassett as the Madonna, and why should Margaret Hyde-Bassett roll her eyes at Wrath ?

VII.

SHOWING HOW SOME VERY NECESSARY INFORMATION MAY SEEM LIKE A DIGRESSION.

It is an obvious truism that love in all human relations is, in the very nature of things, selfish ; those who love unselfishly only do so by living in a state of constant warfare with their meaner instincts. The natural desire is to absorb every thought and moment of the loved being ; to begrudge every interest, and dislike all things and anything which would seem to distract the You from incessant dependence on the Me. This is the undisciplined, raw desire : many conquer it—Wrath, for instance ; more, like Sophia, do not.

Yet she was not an exacting woman—the self-repression was by no means all on his side : she suffered her husband's interest in his pictures with silent heroism ; she oftened remained away from his studio lest she should interrupt his work ; she concealed many of her professional worries for fear of causing him needless anxiety—for a creature so wayward and naturally heedless of others, her thoughtfulness where he was concerned was even pathetic. But it is only one more paradox from that nest of paradoxes —the human heart—that only love is strong enough to subdue love, and affection had worked its great miracle in Sophia's wilful nature. When Wrath was

in question she was capable of any sacrifice, could have made herself as though she were not, would have renounced all things and followed him gladly—did he wish it — into obscurity and the suburbs. It was because she honestly believed that his social position would suffer if their marriage were made known, that she pretended to hold such eccentric and unfeminine views on the subject of a fair name. How the poor creature winced and ached under the looks and whisperings she daily noted and overheard, it would be impossible to say. A woman who is really living an immoral life always feels, like a condemned criminal, that the verdict is, if hard to bear, certainly just. But to Sophia, conscious of her innocence and only too proud to be the wife of the man she loved and honoured above all others, the mud pellets aimed at her reputation, stuck like knives in her heart. That she was suffering for an absurd reason has nothing to do with it : death in grotesque circumstances is none the less death, and the martyr to a fool's cause is still a martyr. As we have said before, it is the heart that makes the occasion.

It had transpired, after Wrath was elected a Royal Academician, that his family was most distinguished : his uncle the Cabinet Minister, his cousins the Wrath-Havilands of Wrath, his mother's aunt, the Marchioness of Welby, and his connections, the Granville-Coxes of Somerset, to say nothing of his step-brother, General Gorm-Gorm, and his step sister-in-law, Lady Gertrude Gorm-Gorm, &c., &c. To Wrath himself the whole thing was too ludicrous to be contemptible, but Sophia—poor Sophia—was undeniably impressed. The early teaching of a

certain excellent governess, whose papa was a retired colonel, had done its work, and the gods of Sophia's childhood, (beginning with a Duke and ending with a Chancery Barrister), remained her gods, although she had seen their altars destroyed, and themselves profanely called humanity. She would not have it said, that Wrath had married beneath him ; she could not see the Duchesses who now flattered him, presently shooting cold glances because he had married an actress. Possibly Sophia did not reason without syllogisms, although the word itself would have caused her considerable alarm.

Her fight for success, (and she did not wake up one morning to find herself famous—she had served her dreary apprenticeship with the rest), had been waged more in the hope of making herself, at least in some small degree, his intellectual equal, than because she had great ideas about Art, or a longing for public applause. She loved her profession, of course, and would have been an accomplished actress had she never known Wrath—for talent does not rest on the accident of forming a certain friendship or meeting such and such a person, but he was her audience, the historic one in a vast multitude, whom every artist singles out as the critic of all others to please. If Wrath approved of her performance all was well ; but if he found fault, not all the praises of the world could have given her the encouragement she needed. Perhaps this was not as it should be from an æsthetic point of view, but Sophia's art was not the result of cultivation but instinctive : she was, in fact, most artistic when she was least scholarly. The poet Gray once wrote of a tragedy that Aristotle's best rules

were observed in it, in a manner which showed the author had never heard of Aristotle. Miss Jenyns's acting had the same unpremeditated excellence. The polite world, however, was doing its best to make her think that her readings were the result of laborious thought, that she spent hours over the nice lifting of an eyelid and devoted months to the right inflexion of a syllable, but Wrath, with his usual bluntness, having declared that "all such twaddle made him sick," she dared not assume prodigious airs in his presence. But she found it humiliating to reflect that she had so very little to do with her own ability—that she was, after all, a sort of puppet controlled by an invisible power, who made her do wonderful things when she thought she was simply acting on a chance idea.

Now young Mauden, fresh from Oxford, with much learning and no wisdom, with Plato in his brain, the Odyssey next his heart, and Aristophanes in his portmanteau—Mauden, who could find the whole of Aristotle in a pause, was exactly the sort of clever youth to persuade a fresh woman into a dull pedant. Already, after one conversation with De Boys on the Irony of Shakespeare contrasted with the Irony of Sophocles, a brief discussion on the respective characters of Lear and Œdipus, with hints at Dumas, so local but so witty, and Augier, whose humour deserted him in a big situation, Sophia was beginning to feel, that Wrath as a dramatic critic lacked culture: he talked too much about work and common sense, and not enough about the True, the Universal, and Objectivity. Yet he, too, was an Oxford man, and well read: so differently do men apply their knowledge.

And here let us judge kindly of Sophia; she had been much spoiled, she was young, beautiful, and had great talents. For even less cause many poor mortals have been led into vainglory, and have suffered much vexation of spirit. She had not yet that great gift of self-knowledge which, though a painful blessing, is still our greatest and the one to be prayed for beyond all others; for the man who knows himself in all his great imperfections and small virtues, suffers more under praise than he ever could under censure—which, at worst, can only remind him of what his too-willing conscience has forgotten.

We have said that when Sophia left the music-room she was, in spite of all reason and duty, jealous; it followed therefore that her vanity was all the more sensitive. The long glance of reverential but intense admiration which fell from the fine eyes of Mr. De Boys Mauden, when she met him in the conservatory, warmed her chilled soul. She smiled divinely, blushed celestially, and murmured, for no earthly reason, "I am late!"

De Boys, reconsidering the meeting afterwards, wondered how he found strength to resist the impulse to cry out "Jane!" and kiss her. Her likeness to Jane—Jane, whom he passionately worshipped, and whom, in all devotion, he hoped to make his adoring wife—was too bewildering.

It is just possible that Odysseus would have gone to greater lengths than the faithful Penelope, on the reasonable argument of a strong resemblance.

VIII.

SHOWING HOW TRAGEDY IS NOT ALWAYS IN FIVE ACTS.

Miss Eliza Bellarmine, all this time, was sitting in front of the looking-glass in her bedroom, wondering whether her eyes showed the effects of weeping. She wept so seldom that when she did, her face for some time afterwards would be irresistibly suggestive of the beach after a storm.

"It is hard," she said, staring at herself, "that one woman should have so much, and another, nothing. Who could blame Wrath?"

From which the intelligent reader will at once gather, that the learned and austere Miss Bellarmine had bestowed her heart on one who had never sought it: on one who she had just learnt was the husband—and the devoted husband—of another woman. So strange is the feminine mind, that while she had quailed under the gossip which associated Wrath and Sophia in a more than charitable alliance, her position did not seem quite desperate. He would arise one day, assert his higher self, and cast about him for chaste society, coupled with moderate charms. But now—O heavy fate!—this could not be: he had married the daughter of Heth.

Eliza had not the temperament of those who consume with idleness and call it hopeless passion;

her love was wholesome and honest, and worked for good, not evil. She was only too well aware that she had no smallest claim on Wrath's consideration: he had given her no encouragement—indeed, it would have been hard to find a man who had less of the drawing-room gallant in his manner with any woman. So marked was his deficiency in the elegant art of disrespectful attentions that many fashionable ladies declared they could not endure the rude monster, and were he not supposed to be wonderfully clever (although *they* could see nothing in his pictures), they would never even notice the wretch. Eliza, therefore, like many of us in unhappy circumstances, had only her own foolishness to blame, and that she knew this was not the least bitter of her several pangs. But already she had put Wrath out of her heart for all time.

"Never, never, never, never!"

This was her solemn incantation, and lo! even as she spoke the only romance of her dull life shivered, sobbed, and vanished. She could have cut off her hand with the same unhesitating precision had it seemed necessary. But such triumphs, whether over the will or the body, are not cheaply won: decisive moments are not realized by time, and what is done in sixty ticks of the clock the soul must remember or regret for eternity.

Eliza, having mastered a great situation in her life, was only conscious that she felt much older and very tired. She bathed her eyes, ordered herself some tea, and sat down to read Arckenholz on Christina of Sweden—four portentous volumes which she had chosen from Sir Benjamin's library as light, yet

useful reading. And although it might have been more dramatic if she had indulged instead on a long soliloquy on the hollowness of life, the injustice of God, and so on, there are those who might think it was more heroic to blow her despised nose and study a tedious historian.

Half an hour later when Eliza entered the drawing-room she discovered Wrath and Lady Hyde-Bassett playing chess, and Sophia (who hated games of every description), engaged in a most animated conversation with De Boys Mauden. No one seemed to notice her entrance except Margaret, who gave her a swift smile and indicated with her eyes a new book on the side-table, as much as to say, "That will interest *you* more than either of these men." Eliza sighed, but drifted towards the volume. Literature was still her friend.

"How I should like to paint her as St. Martha," said Wrath, in a low voice, to Lady Hyde-Bassett; "she has just that expression of kind, yet terrible energy St. Martha must have had!"

"How a love affair would improve her!" said Margaret; "every woman should have at least one love affair."

"But she is a nice creature," said Wrath. "I am very fond of her. She is a good but inaccessible angel."

"I am going to marry her to Claverhouse Digges," said her ladyship, confidently, "I shall arrange it all next autumn!"

Artistic chess is a game beyond the petty restrictions of science.

IX.

WHICH INTRODUCES A DOWAGER AND A PEER.

The Dowager Countess of Warbeck awoke one morning at eight o'clock and discovered that she could not fall asleep again. She rang for her maid, complained that she had passed an extremely bad night (for she usually slept till nine), and arose from her bed.

"Will your ladyship have breakfast earlier than usual?" said the maid.

"No," said her ladyship, who did not feel hungry; "but tell Dawson to sound the gong for prayers at half-past eight." She therefore put her bad night to excellent account by reading her assembled household three lessons instead of one. Would that all good Christians killed their time with so much profit—to others!

When the domestics had solemnly filed out of the big dining-room, the Dowager turned to her grandson—the one prop of her declining years—with an air of almost tragic appeal.

"I suppose," she said, "I must go to Brentmore and see this Battle—or Cattle—person?"

"It would look more friendly, if you did," said her grandson, "but I have no wish to urge anything of the kind upon you, if you feel unequal to it."

"I never allow myself to feel unequal to a duty, Warbeck. But the position is heart-breaking."

The position which her ladyship found so distressing was briefly this: she had been the second wife of the 14th Earl, by whom she had one son, the father of the present Warbeck. The late Earl, however, had had four other sons by his previous marriage, the youngest of whom (Edmund), he had disowned for marrying a yeoman's daughter. Not to detain the reader with tedious particulars it will be sufficient to say that Destiny had played many sad and unlooked-for tricks with the three elder sons and their children, and now, with the not uncommon irony of human affairs, Jane Shannon, the daughter of the cast-off Edmund, was heiress to the great estate. The Dowager's grandson had the peerage, but the cream of the property—the famous "Drawne acres" of that Anne whom we mentioned in the first chapter—had fallen to Jane. No wonder the Countess could not sleep for bitterness of spirit, and no wonder Warbeck was leaving England that very morning for the Continent.

"After all these *thousands* of years, to see a Warbeck reduced to poverty!" groaned the Dowager—"I repeat, *poverty!* Heversham Place is the sort of residence for a superior cottage hospital, and Graylands is only fit to let to some American, or to a Colonial. *You* cannot possibly live there. No Earl of Warbeck has had his foot inside it since 1550. Drawne estates, indeed! Who would have heard of them if Anne Drawne had not married a Shannon? Who fought for them, bled for them, died for them? No Drawnes, but the Earls of Warbeck. And now this Cattle person is to have them all—and Grosvenor Square, too!" This was her magnificent manner of referring

to the town mansion, as though only one house in London could justly claim that address. "Grosvenor Square, too," she repeated; "and you with no roof over your head. *Fifteen thousand a year?* What is that? *Far more than you need?* It is not a question of *need*, it is a question of what you *require*—what is decent. And as for calling this Cattle person, Lady Jane——" Words failed her.

Her grandson smiled patiently; he knew this harangue by heart. But he never permitted himself —even in solitude—to fall below the Stoic ideal. He wore a hair-shirt under his fine linen, and took his rule of life from Sir Thomas More, but, unlike that saint, he suffered religious doubts. It was said that if he had written something touching against Christianity, or something pretty about Moll Flanders, he would have been a Superior Person. But Superior Persons do not wear hair-shirts. There are good men who yet bear on their countenance the scars of many battles lost and won; their knowledge of good is ever shadowed by their knowledge of evil; they are all things to all men that they may by all means save some. But Warbeck was not of these. Sir Launcelot may have died an holy man, but Sir Galahad lived holily also. It was the latter knight who had most fired the young peer's imagination. His was no self-conscious virtue, however; at times he even affected airs of worldly cynicism which reminded his grandmother of the Miltonic Archangel who tried to explain heavenly mysteries in earthly language—and blushed red in the attempt. He was, too, a powerful fellow—no weakling, who made a virtue of debility, but a man. "What a fish for the Church!" said a bishop, who had his eye upon him.

Warbeck had all that longing of a strong nature to help some one—to feel that he was of some use in the world; and he would have undergone any suffering or hardship if he had once persuaded himself that his pain would promote another's peace. But to suffer to no purpose; to study for hours with no other desire than the accumulation of barren knowledge; to pour weak advice into unwilling ears; to offer dumb praise to a deaf God; to spend his time, as a witty philosopher has said, milking a he-goat into a sieve—these were things he could not do. He knew that he was considered promising by those friends whose judgment he could not choose but value, and his University career had more than fulfilled their expectations. Yet the self-distrust was there—a haunting thought lest, in the end, he would not only disappoint those who were dear to him on earth, but that possible God who had a way of asserting His authority in the form of a still, small conscience. Youth is naturally impatient, and is not content to remain blind for even three days like St. Paul, nor can young enthusiasm believe readily that those also serve who only stand and wait. The impulse is to rush into the fray, to kill or be killed, but both or either without loss of time or hindrance. Vanity, too, and ambition, no less than a zeal of serving the Almighty and humanity, may have something to do with the fierceness of this desire, so easy is it to flatter the soul that the glorification of self is all to the glory of God. These and similar thoughts, while they restrained Warbeck from any active participation in public affairs, were silently working for good, strengthening his judgment, and giving him some insight into his own heart and human perplexi-

ties. He would know his work in due season; but the time was not yet come. Already he had heard the whispers of a calling, though the voice was dim and far off, not yet to be perfectly known. So he tried to be patient.

When the Countess of Warbeck's carriage drove up to "Up-at-Battle's" that same afternoon, (Brentmore is about three hours' railway journey from London), Miss Caroline was what she called *turning out* the sitting-room. Both she and her niece had dusters pinned round their heads, and wore big aprons. Although the preceding night had brought a lawyer's letter telling Jane of her extraordinary change of fortune, she had not realized its full meaning—nor, indeed, had Miss Caroline. They were both simple-minded beings, and had been brought up to think that their daily tasks must be performed, even though the heavens were falling. It was the *day* for the parlour, and though Jane had inherited all England, the room had to be swept and garnished by some one, and as Jane was on the spot, she was, of course, the some one to do it.

Jane opened the door herself, and found the footman standing—almost gingerly, as though he were treading on very doubtful substance—on the front step.

"Is Miss Battle at home?" said he, saying Battle with difficulty, for his tongue did not take kindly to trashy syllables. (The Dowager had made up her mind that she would first ask to see the aunt, and thus avoid the unspeakable Lady Jane Shannon. "Fiddle-de-dee on courtesy!" she had told her grandson.)

The footman assisted his aged mistress out of the carriage with respectful sympathy.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing——?" began Lady Warbeck, feeling for the first time in her life, and very much against her will, that it is not the apron which makes the servant.

"I am Jane," said the girl; "will you come into the kitchen, for the sitting-room is full of dust?"

The Countess, in spite of her eccentricities, was a well-bred woman—one who had travelled much, observed much, and read much. She was, too, so absolutely sure of her own excellent social position that she suffered none of those fears so common to mushroom nobility, lest she might not be taken for the exalted being she was. She could, if necessary, adapt herself to any scene or any society; she did not look less a countess because she sat in a kitchen. Good breeding does not require a background. She always held, however, that nervousness in her august presence showed very proper feeling, so she looked at Jane very hard for seeming so unembarrassed. Jane met her look modestly, and with the respect which instinct taught her was due to one who was so many years her senior, but with no more fear than if her great relative had been—as her ladyship wrote to Warbeck—"a tabby cat on a wall."

Miss Caroline appeared from the scullery, where she had been washing her hands, and greeted her visitor with much old-fashioned grace, but, it must be owned, little style. That is to say, she neither tittered nor stared, nor assumed an unnatural voice, but spoke and acted exactly as she always did when there was no one in sight and hearing save Battle and Jane.

"I suppose," said Lady Warbeck, when she had learnt that they were both quite well and did not find the weather trying—"I suppose you are making your preparations to come up to town. But Grosvenor Square is a little sombre just at present."

"It must be dreadful," said Jane, with much sympathy, "so soon after a death."

"Shocking!" said her ladyship—"Shocking! It has been a matter of national regret; the Queen sent me three telegrams."

Their thoughts were disjointed and confused; these three wondering women—one young, two simple, and one neither young nor simple—had all kind hearts, although education, experience, and rank had set very different seals on each.

Miss Caroline looked at the Countess, and saw more than an elderly lady in a bonnet and mantle.

"Poor thing!" she said, and her honest eyes filled with tears.

Lady Warbeck did not know how to explain that by no possible effort of her imagination could she think of herself as a Thing. So she pretended not to hear.

"I cannot yet trust myself to speak of these painful events," she went on. "I hope I am resigned. 'Man that is born of woman——' It is not for us to question the inscrutable decrees of Providence." Then she turned to Jane. "It would give me much pleasure if you would spend a week or so with me, and I think, in the peculiar circumstances, it would be the most proper course to pursue."

"I think so too," said Miss Caroline. "I have been worrying ever since last night—when we heard

—because I knew no one who could really advise her and tell her just what to do. Girls are so thoughtless."

"So much depends on one's bringing-up," murmured her ladyship. "I daresay you are looking forward with immense delight to your future life, and your first season, and your new frocks, and so on!" (The Dowager was most serious when she seemed flippant.)

Jane had all a girl's love for beautiful clothes, and already she had certainly dreamt of a heavenly gown, soft-hued, with *straight* back seams and a train. She had also designed a black silk dolman for her Aunt Caroline. She therefore blushed a little at Lady Warbeck's question, and owned that she had thought of ordering a new dress.

"Can you return with me to-morrow?" said Lady Warbeck, venturing a smile; "there are a great many tiresome legal matters to go through, but our man of business—he will be yours as well now," she added, with a sigh—the sigh was absolutely necessary—"is most considerate. Everything, no doubt, will adjust itself in the most satisfactory manner."

As a matter of fact, she began to see possibilities as many and great and tall as the Anakims. Warbeck, happily, was still unmarried. . . . She had decided that Jane only needed to have her hair done properly, and to be generally overhauled by a good maid. For the rest, she was even pleasing; she was uncommon, and uncommon girls were in demand; that was why those Americans married so well.

"You must keep your delightful country ideas," she said, pleasantly, remembering Lord Warbeck's love of the unaffected. "I hope London will not make you cynical. Men hate cynical girls."

"Why should London change her?" said Miss Caroline, wondering whether "cynical" was a new epidemic: something of an asthmatic nature.

"Well, I hardly know how to explain," said the Countess. "It is one of those things one takes for granted."

Miss Caroline looked anxiously at Jane. Everything in the nature of change alarmed her.

"Do you think," she said, at last, "that London will be good for Jane?"

"London is very healthy," said Lady Warbeck. "My doctor tells me that even the fogs are wholesome—if your lungs can stand them."

"It is not the fogs I fear," said Miss Caroline, "it's the folk."

"The folk?" said Lady Warbeck, "the *folk?* I understand. I know very little about them. They keep in the East End. Once or twice my dear stepson lent them Grosvenor Square for a meeting. But we were all out of town at the time."

"Aunt Caroline calls everybody, folk," explained Jane, colouring in her effort not to laugh.

"Really?" said the Countess. "Of course there is no such thing as *everybody*—that is a newspaper vulgarism. One is either a somebody or a nobody—irrespective of rank or profession. The next best thing to a somebody, is a nobody in a good set!"

She smiled as she spoke, for there were few pleasures she enjoyed so much as expounding the truths that be—as she understood them. Had she been born in a humbler sphere she would, no doubt, have been the principal of a ladies' college. Women who possess what Mr. Joe Gargery called a "master mind," like

to manage men, but they like to manage other women still better: it is a greater triumph from an artistic point of view. Lady Warbeck promised herself unalloyed joy in directing the unsophisticated being Heaven had dropped in her way.

She had to endure several pangs, however, as she drove to the hotel, (where she was spending the night), for she could not persuade herself that because Jane was unassuming she was necessarily meek. And meekness in a *protégé* is an essential, if one is to be a patroness with any degree of comfort or satisfaction. The Dowager was by nature a kind woman. If she was approached with what she considered proper respect, she was often found even heroic. She would put herself out to do amiable things: she arranged meetings between people who wanted or were wanted to make each other's acquaintance; she found berths for younger sons; she assisted mothers with their daughters; she begged unscrupulously from the rich; she pushed young talent (she encouraged all the arts); she recommended governesses, and dressmakers, and orphan homes, and hospitals, and hotels, and deserving cases—indeed, to sum up her virtues in a sentence, she never missed an opportunity of doing something to her credit. And now she had taken a fancy to Jane—which was the highest possible credit to both of them. For her ladyship had good taste and was not easily satisfied.

"The child is neither good form nor bad," she wrote to Warbeck. "She is no form at all, and would be called *original.* (I do not mean that she swears like Lady Buntynge.) She is very innocent, and has, I assume, *no* accomplishments. But really,

dear, I cannot help thinking *that* is an advantage. Nowadays *every* one wants to perform and *no* one will listen, and a nice quiet girl who can *merely* appreciate would be much sought after. She must take up some *serious* interest, and I shall advise *Greek*—it is better than philanthropy, because it does not let one in for *bazaars*. I shall also urge the engagement of a governess-companion — that sweet, lady-like person whom the dear Baroness was telling me of would be *just* the creature. In appearance your cousin (for she *is* your cousin, after all) is most pleasing, her features and bearing reminded me in the most *painful* manner of your grandfather." (*The deceased peer in question had been distinguished for his moral rather than his physical charms. His wife, however, may have discerned him spiritually.*) "Imagine my *boundless* relief to be so agreeably disappointed. She is *much* handsomer than Tunborough's *scraggy* Lady Marian. By the bye, I hear that Lady Marian's photographs are for *sale* in all the shop-windows, and that they sell better than those of that *Granada* person, who has such fine legs and *jumps*. Lady Dundry, Marian's godmother, is so upset about it that she has *turned Roman Catholic*. Poor dear!" (*Lady Warbeck divided the human race into dears, poor dears, and persons.*) "I will write more fully in a day or two, but remember that I am getting old and cannot be with you much longer.

"Your affectionate grandmother,
"A. WARBECK."

"That little hint about my age," she thought, "will bring him home at the end of the month."

And she slept more soundly that night than she had for many weeks.

Jane, on the morrow, when she found herself actually seated in the train and gliding out of the little station at Brentmore, hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. She had not shed tears over her parting with her grandfather and Aunt Caroline, for she was coming back to see them again so shortly, and they had both seemed in such good spirits at her wonderful fortune. (Fortunately, Jane was not hard to deceive, for neither old Battle nor his daughter were adepts at concealing their emotions.) But now she felt lonely; the Countess had warned her that she always slept when she was travelling, and never attempted to talk, so Jane stared out of the window, and found her only comfort in thinking that now she was rich she could send De Boys anonymous bank-notes and so enjoy the rare distinction of helping a genius. For she no longer thought of him as her lover: a very dear friend, that was all, a sort of relation, almost a brother—but more interesting. If he ever married and had children she would be their godmother and *try* to like his wife. She might also build him a church, and in the meantime she would do all she could for poor Mr. O'Nelligan, the curate, who had been his tutor.

When she thought of herself she was at once both eager and fearful to learn what the Future would be: as if there is not always still another Future—when one Future has become a Past—to fear and yet rush into! Her personal experience of the world was slight to the point of nothingness, but from a long course of incessant and unsystematic reading she had gathered

such a variety of (more or less uncertain) knowledge, from metaphysic to the Greek drama, that she was, as she told her aunt, prepared for anything. In imagination, she had walked in courts and market-places, in ancestral halls and suburban villas; poets, scholars, and wits were her constant companions, not to mention kings and archbishops; for one accustomed to such company, the Dowager Countess of Warbeck, and even a row of flunkies, had no terror. When she saw the big drawing-rooms at Queen's Gate (the Dowager's town residence) she thought that the kitchen at Up-at-Battle's was more cheerful. Even the piano, which had ebony legs and was elegantly draped in an Indian shawl, seemed to cry out for a sympathetic touch. Jane in her grey alpaca felt very sorry for it. Lady Warbeck had been fully prepared to see her trip over the rugs, slide off the brocaded chairs, and dazzled by the unaccustomed splendour of her surroundings. It was disappointing in some respects that she did not, yet, on the whole, satisfactory.

"To-morrow," said her ladyship, "I suppose you would like to see Grosvenor Square?"

"Any day you think best, grandmamma!" said Jane.

The Dowager had told her that she preferred this mode of address. But, as her maid told the housekeeper, "Her lad'ship was not born yesterday—*she* knew what *she* was about, bless you!"

"Trust her," said the housekeeper, "she's got the brains of the whole fam'ly; she'll marry Lady Jane to his lordship—mark my words!"

Thus profanely do hirelings discern the hidden motives of the mighty.

X.

IN WHICH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN DEFINES DUTY AND OTHER UNCERTAINTIES.

GIVEN two young people, idleness, and a week, and the sum total is Folly ; add the artistic temperament and a pretty gift for philosophic discussion, and you get Sympathy ; multiply by a sound knowledge of the Classic amorists, and the result is Romance.

De Boys had been at The Cloisters one week when he received tidings of Jane's altered position. He felt at once that whatever hopes he had formed with regard to their marriage, would now be idle, nay, more—presumptuous. Such instant surrender, it may be, showed modesty and good taste, but for a lover he was, perhaps, resigned too soon. Resignation is an heroic virtue, but it best displays its spirit after a sharp tussle with despair. In this instance, however, it seemed as though the two giants had merely yawned at each other. Mauden had not the smallest doubt of his great love for Jane, notwithstanding he wrote so seldom and a cold tone had crept into her replies—all that sort of thing could be put right in a single interview, when the time came for a serious understanding, —or, at least, it might have been put right, if she had not inherited this beastly money—and the beastlier title. He had already made up his mind not to enter

the Church, and had his eyes fixed on a professorial chair. Professor Mauden and Lady Jane Mauden did not, in his opinion, sound well. By a confusion of ideas, too, Jane Shannon seemed the shadow and Sophia Jenyns the reality, and while he composed his pretty speeches to Jane, he rehearsed them (with appropriate expression) to Sophia. It must be remembered, he was quite unaware that the actress was Wrath's wife.

Wrath had begun his Madonna, and when he was not painting, he would sit in rapturous thought. The Madonna, too, not to speak irreverently, had Margaret's nose—and Sophia's nose had a far finer shape than Lady Hyde-Bassett's. Sophia shed bitter tears over the agonizing pettiness of the whole trouble; but, in the first place, she was feeling ill, and secondly, as she told herself, straws show which way the wind blows. That her husband made his picture like Margaret, against his will—indeed, unconsciously—was a significant and appalling fact: his very St. Joseph had a look of her. Yet Wrath fondly imagined that his work was purely ideal, flatly opposed to realism, all composed from the unearthly material of his religious instinct. These reflections and a constant headache were as frank in their villainy as the stage-direction—"Enter, attendant, with two murderers." No creatures for compromise, these!

Sophia was strolling in the garden with De Boys one afternoon, and found herself thinking that love was a mistake—it made one too unhappy; friendship, on the other hand, was soothing and agreeable.

"Social conventions," De Boys was saying, "are the greatest nuisance. I would banish them with a

fiery sword. There were none such in the Garden of Eden!"

"Ah, but in the Garden of Eden there was only one woman!" sighed Sophia.

"Why," he said, in an injured voice, "do you always pretend to be so cynical? I do not see why we cannot go back to—to the sort of existence—I mean the idyllic and perfect state of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Merely viewed as a philosophical experiment it might at least be attempted. If it proved successful, it would encourage others——"

"But if it failed——" said Sophia.

He cleared his throat. "You must let me translate for you some tremendous passages from the 'Phaedrus,'" he replied. "Plato deals with the whole question as only a poet can—for he was a poet. And I think you will say with me that it is a poet's subject; its philosophy is not of this world, but is, as it were, a figure of the True, and musical, as is Apollo's lute. I cannot agree with Browning when he speaks of—

"'The heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the world to lose itself in the sky.'

Why give so much consolation to those who have failed to realize their ideals—who have merely aspired, and utter no word of praise to those who have actually attained to Higher Things? All the teaching of the present day seems to assume that no man or woman ever yet accomplished a purpose, or thoroughly believed in anything or anybody!" It is so delightful to be young, and long-winded, and able to believe, at

least, in oneself! "A hero, nowadays," he went on, "need not fight: he has only to say he would like to fight if he could!"

"You have so much moral courage," said Sophia, "and I have none!"

"If I may say so, I think you are the most courageous woman I have ever met. You have not only the power to Will—but to Do."

"I fear you are mistaken. I have too much Do and too little Will—if you understand me."

"A little impulsive, perhaps."

"I can only resist one impulse by yielding to another," said Sophia. "I know my own character too well. I need a restraining force."

De Boys drew himself up, and would have made a fine allegorical study for any of the heroic virtues.

"You," he said, "may need a restraining force in the same way that a highly poetical imagination requires discipline: noble desires and fine thoughts must not be wasted on that 'chartered libertine,' the air." The breeze stirred a maddening curl which fluttered on the nape of Sophia's neck, and the young man sighed. So far, air had the advantage of philosophy.

"A woman like you," he said, "so extraordinarily gifted—I speak quite impersonally—might do so much by refusing to accept the low standard of existing morality. We want some beautiful and witty saint: what Wrath might call 'a saint in drawing.' It is such a cruel wrong to give people the idea that only sinners are amusing or good-looking. There is sublime beauty, no doubt, in the mere expression of a pure-minded being: but when a fine spirit is set in

fair material, and she can flavour her chaste conversation with Attic salt, her influence must undoubtedly cover a larger field than if she looked dowdy and talked banalities. And, I take it, a woman who did not accept life in its vanity, would find no possible pleasure in the adornment of her own person: she would simply regard it as a duty which she owed to society—one which, I think, would come under the head of honouring the king!"

Sophia felt her enthusiasm rising towards sainthood: De Boys had a perfectly charming view of moral obligations.

"You think," she quavered, "it is a duty to try—and look—decent!" Two hours and a half spent over her toilette that morning needed some slight justification.

De Boys's eyes wandered over her face and figure.

"Unquestionably," he said, with what resembled, but was not, calmness; "unquestionably, a duty."

"How," said Sophia, "should one begin if one wished to rebel against existing low standards of morality?"

"By the silent but convincing force of example," he replied—"by your actions."

"What kind of actions?" she asked. "You know—I have—" she blushed—"a soup kitchen."

Delicious simpleton! and with it all, a genius!

"Soup kitchens," he said gravely, "are excellent; but, morally speaking, they do not convey anything but soup."

Their eyes met, and the result was a duet in laughter.

"You shall not make fun of me," she said at last.

"Make fun of you! As if I could make fun of you!"

"I often laugh at myself," she said. "I am always ridiculous; even when I am unhappy I am perfectly absurd. All my tragedy is in my acting; my real life is a burlesque."

"But when are you unhappy?" he said, in a voice of unfeigned concern, and with a fierce glance at the imaginary offender. "When are you unhappy?"

"Often," said Sophia; "in fact, always. I am so tired of being treated like a buffoon! Even Wrath himself—even Wrath, my first and dearest friend——" she paused.

"Of course," said De Boys, swallowing envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness at one gulp, "he must be your dearest friend."

"All my life," she faltered—"all my life—my friend; but even he tells me that I act well only because I must. And is not that in itself sufficient to prove that he regards me as an irresponsible being—a marionette with a faculty of speech? I know my words are often very silly, but my thoughts are terribly serious. Oh, if he knew how serious!"

De Boys himself was surprised at her change of manner—although it had never occurred to him that she was absolutely flippant. He had explained away her whimsicalities and nonsense as the vagaries of genius. What would have looked like affectation in a woman of commonplace attainments, seemed, at least, pardonable in one who had so many atoning qualities; she was not, however, attractive because of her foolishness, but in spite of it. Young and inexperienced as Mauden was, he felt all this no less

than the middle-aged Wrath, who had loved Sophia too long, and loved her too deeply, not to love also with wisdom. The difference between these two men—the one who loved her and the one who thought he loved her—was shown in the fact that, while Wrath helped her, as delicately as he could, to overcome her faults, Mauden encouraged them. Yet such is the contrariety between effects and intentions, that neither Wrath nor Mauden, nor, be it said, any human creature, could give Sophia the one thing needful—peace of heart. She chafed alike under praise or blame: no one understood her, no one knew what she really meant or really wanted; even her nearest, best, and dearest misconstrued her ten times a day.

"If he only knew," she repeated, "how serious I am!"

"You must remember," said Mauden, "there are a great many years between you; Wrath probably regards you still as a small child. It was and is exactly the same in my own home: my uncle—the kindest and most generous man in the world—never can understand that my days for leading-strings are past."

Sophia caught her breath: De Boys had plucked up the very root of the matter. She was no companion for Wrath: he thought her too young—perhaps she wearied him, just as children occasionally tire even the fondest of their relatives. It was only natural that he should find Margaret Hyde-Bassett's society so pleasant: they were nearer in years, they had both lost their sensitiveness to mere impressions, and were now rather re-colouring their old experiences than gaining fresh ones.

"I never thought of that before," she said, "but now you speak of it, I see the reasonableness of the idea. It explains everything."

"But," said De Boys, "we are both young: we can never seem children to each other. We both know that we are responsible beings, that we are masters of our fate: that we are under the law of liberty."

"Masters of our fate," repeated Sophia; "do you believe that?"

"How can I disbelieve it," he said, "when I live and have the evidence of each day to convince me."

Sophia turned her face towards him. "Tell me," she said, "what I must do. I am tired of thinking. The world seems so unreal sometimes, and words and people and things lose all meaning. But I could be obedient, I could do what I was told, and I think—I could be happy that way. I want to escape from my own commands: I—I am too merciless a tyrant."

"Sophia!" said Mauden. He had never called her Sophia before: it was a great step for him, but she was too preoccupied to notice it. "Sophia," he said, again, "can we not both be obedient to our best instincts? can we not follow them—together?"

"What are they?" said Sophia; "and can we trust them?"

Before he could reply, the sound of Wrath's deep, rare laughter came through the windows which opened on the lawn. Was it thus that Madonnas were painted?

"Finish," said Sophia, turning pale—"finish what you were going to say—when he laughed."

"I think I could write it better," said De Boys.

"Do you, too, write?" she said. "A—a friend of mine had—a friend who never told her anything, but he wrote beautiful letters—oh, such letters! and then he would walk up and down the room while she read them." Her head drooped and her voice trembled; these reminiscences were heart-breaking. "But," she said, looking up, "you are not at all like the man who did that: you are quite—quite different. I should have thought *you* could have spoken out."

"I can," cried De Boys, on his mettle—"I can! I will, now that you have told me—I may."

"Of course you *may*," said Sophia, "because my knowledge of you assures me that you will not say anything—silly. I mean something which ought not to be said—or written."

"Friendship," said De Boys—"perfect friendship casteth out fear. Between friends there ought to be no dread of giving offence."

"N—no!" said Sophia; "but at the same time we must not think that our friends are the only people we can treat rudely, and with unkindness."

"Unkindness!" said De Boys. "How can you so misunderstand me!"

"I was not thinking of you," she said. "At that moment I had other friends in my mind—women friends."

This was only a half-truth, and it flashed across her mind that it was not easy to be saintly even in the course of a most innocent conversation: one could lie in all circumstances and for the most trivial reason—indeed, for no reason in the world.

"The ideal union," began De Boys—"the union we have already discussed——"

"The Before-the-Fall ideal," she said, quickly. "I know."

"Why could not we—would you be willing—I should say—would you mind very much—being called my wife?"

"My dear De Boys!" she murmured, with maternal pity and affection—"My dear De Boys"—and she looked at him, smiling helplessly—"My dear De Boys!"

Anything more chilling to lover-like aspirations is not to be imagined. Long years afterwards the echo of that motherly "My dear De Boys!" could bring an east wind on the warmest day.

"It is my turn," he said, hotly, "to be treated like a buffoon when I am serious!"

"Don't say that," said Sophia; "but—but the idea startled me!"

"Is that all?" he said, eagerly; "because, in that case, you might become accustomed to it."

"First," she murmured, at last, "let us clearly understand what the idea is."

"We should remain, just as we are—friends," said the young man, "only truer friends than the world understands by the term; but, as a concession to propriety, we would go through the ceremony of marriage. It—it is rather difficult to explain in detail: the ideal never does lend itself to definition!"

"There would be no love-making—nothing silly," said Sophia, "nothing commonplace, and ridiculous, and domestic!"

"Certainly not."

"Then," said the lady, "suppose we tried it for a little before we actually bound ourselves by any religious and legal form?"

He saw immediately the countless advantages of this suggestion, and, as they unrolled themselves he grew pale at the *dis*advantages of his first plan. It is the memory of peril and not peril itself which is so appalling. De Boys looked back at the last ten minutes as he might have glanced at a thunderbolt which had missed him by an inch.

"We must, of course, do nothing rash," he said, "because rashness would mar the harmony of the action. To do things decently and in order is the very rhythm of existence."

"I will think it well over," said Sophia, "and let you know my decision on Monday; but until then do not refer again to the subject. If we talk, it must be as though this conversation had never taken place."

"But on Monday," said De Boys, "I must leave."

"Then," said Sophia, calmly, "I will tell you in good time, so that you may make the necessary preparations — whether I have decided to accompany you."

"But," he stammered, "might not that look odd? Your guardian——"

"I am not Wrath's ward," she said; "I am my own mistress. Leave everything to me."

A long silence followed: they sauntered, one of them quite blindly, towards the house.

"I fancy," he said, "I heard the dressing-gong."

Sophia thought, that although he was a better conversationalist than Wrath he did not wear so well: two hours seemed to exhaust the fund of his ideas.

Now Wrath could maintain an interesting silence from year's end to year's end.

"Oh! the difference of man and man!"

Gentler ladies than Goneril have had occasion to utter the same lamentation.

XI.

IN WHICH ANOTHER YOUNG GENTLEMAN DEFINES DUTY.

THE Dowager Countess of Warbeck found Jane more interesting each day; she was so quiet in manner, so sweet-tempered, so thoughtful, so sensible—in fact, the Dowager's letters to her dear friends the Marchioness of Dayme and the Lady Dundry, were always overweight during that period. Her notes to her grandson, however, were brief, telling much of her own ill-health and very little of Jane. The Countess never made the fatal mistake of supposing that the rest of mankind were fools, and she alone had wisdom; she gave every creature credit for a certain amount of perception and a great deal of cunning. For this reason her machinations usually proved successful. She was extremely careful not to drop a word which might excite Warbeck's suspicion of her darling scheme; she even wrote him a glowing account of a new *débutante* who, she declared, had exactly the kind of beauty he admired. Her heart swelled with a diplomatist's pride when she received a telegram from the young peer announcing his sudden return to England. "Let him once see Jane," she thought, "and the rest is inevitable."

In the meantime, his portrait (painted by Wrath,

the Academician) was placed in a better light, and Jane was occasionally reminded that although the work in question was an excellent likeness, it did not do the original full justice. "No artist," said the Dowager, "could ever catch his smile!"

"He is certainly very handsome," said Jane. "Grandfather's nephew," she added, after a little pause, "is also handsome. The one, you know, who is so clever and who is now at Oxford. Would you like to see his photograph?"

"I would," said her ladyship, drily. To her horror, Jane unfastened her gown at the throat and displayed a small locket and chain. She opened the locket and handed it, with a blush, to her grandmama.

"Not a bad-looking person—for his kind," said the Dowager, not at all bad-looking. He has a look of Spence" (Spence was the head footman). "I am sure he is most worthy. But I would not wear him in a locket! It might give stupid people the idea that you were in love with him—and there are so many stupid people! Besides, if it came to his ears he might think the same thing. Young men are so conceited."

"Oh!" said Jane, "I should not like him to think that. I—I do not see how he could. He—he isn't conceited, and—and he is not a bit like Spence!"

"My dear," said her ladyship, "what would you say yourself, if you saw a young girl wearing a man's photograph on her neck? It is not maidenly—in fact, with no desire to hurt your feelings, it is immodest. I appreciate your childish and innocent sentiment in the matter—affection and gratitude are always charming, even when sadly misplaced; but you are no longer a little girl running wild in the

fields. The only person you could wear in that fashion would be your husband, or, in conceivable circumstances, your future husband. But as you have neither one nor the other at present, it is more seemly that your neck should be unfettered. Enjoy your liberty while you may." She smiled her sweetest—and the Dowager could smile like an angel when she chose—but Jane sighed. The chain, however, and the photograph were slipped into her pocket; she could not be immodest, and, no doubt, her grandmama had spoken sound sense.

"Play me that exquisite *Presto*," said the Countess. "I doat on Beethoven when he escapes from that terrible diddledy-diddledy-diddledy in the bass. The Brentmore person really taught you extremely well. Take it at a good pace."

One has not much time to muse on the absent if one is playing a Presto, and an active lady marks the time with her cane.

Warbeck was expected to luncheon that same day, and the Countess had given orders that he was to be shown into the library, as she wished a few moments' private conversation with him. Jane, therefore, was half-way through the Presto when his lordship's arrival was announced.

"Don't stop playing, my dear," said the Dowager. "I so like to hear music in the distance."

Then she went down to her grandson.

The young man came forward as she entered the room, and seemed surprised, delighted, and relieved to see her walking.

"You must be much better," he said; "I have

been so anxious about you. I hardly dared hope that you were even on the sofa ! "

" I am almost myself, dear," said his grandmother. " I began to improve from the instant I received your telegram. Sir Claretie says he considers my recovery a miracle. But you are not looking well."

He was thinner and paler than he had been a fortnight since, and had, in some way, a new expression, an even greater seriousness of manner.

" You have something on your mind," said her ladyship, suddenly ; " you are going to tell me that you are engaged ! "

Warbeck smiled, but shook his head. " *Cherchez la femme* is such stale doctrine," he said.

" There is no newer doctrine for the old Adam ! " said the Dowager ; " but if there is no woman in your news, then it has something to do with religion. Do not say that you have been reading Hooker, and Laud, and the rest of them, and have become High Church ! "

" I read Hooker and Laud long ago," he said, " but I am not a High Churchman."

" Then," she said, " you are a Higher Pantheist. Oh dear ! "

" To save you further suspense," he said, " I am still —nothing. But I have joined a Celibate Brotherhood."

The Countess did not look shocked, but her aspect was certainly grave.

" It means, of course, the end of everything—from an ambitious point of view," she said, slowly.

" I think," said Warbeck, " it means the beginning of everything—from the only point of view worth considering."

"Quite so," said her ladyship—"quite so. But there is neither wisdom nor virtue in renouncing marriage unless you fully realize what marriage is and what it has to offer. In my opinion it is far more difficult to be a married saint than a saint in the cloisters; Bishop Taylor has pointed this out with much eloquence. Do you think you will never wish to marry?"

Warbeck laughed with the buoyancy of a mortal who has never loved. Before he could reply, the Countess checked him.

"I see," she said, "you know nothing about it. I should feel better satisfied if I knew that you had had some romantic experience. Because if it does not come early—it will come late. And then what trouble! I have seen such unhappiness come of people assuming that because they never have cared for any one, they never will."

"You see," said Warbeck, serenely, "if a man knows that he is under a vow of celibacy the question of sex becomes a dead letter. A woman is merely an individual! The effect of a vow is almost miraculous."

The Countess groaned. "The great thing," she said, "is to be saved from oneself, and oneself so easily passes for a great conviction! See how many young people gabble off the marriage vows: and *their* effect is by no means miraculous."

"Well," said Warbeck, naïvely, "when you consider what a large proportion of humanity take them, you must admit that, on the whole, they observe them very faithfully. Society is so small and the world is so large, one must look at the marriages of the world."

"This brotherhood," she said, "this society, or whatever it is, you have joined, is not, I understand, religious?"

If it was not religious, she thought, one could wriggle out of its ridiculous regulations, and even if it was, one could, in an emergency, change one's religion! She was a lady who only considered impediments for the purpose of destroying them.

"Oh, no," said Warbeck, "its work is purely secular. Dawes, of Balliol, founded it—you know Dawes, of course?"

"Dawes?" said the Countess. "Do you mean the person who lives at Shoreditch and writes to the *Times* about the Athenian Democracy?"

Warbeck nodded his head. "He is a tremendous swell," he said; "he is the sort of genius who lives in seclusion and animates a great public movement. There must always be a grand character of that kind, who can despise fame and use ambitious men as tools."

"Dear me!" said the Dowager; "so you, I presume, are in this Mr. Dawes's tool-basket?"

This was not the way to express an unselfish young man's devotion to a noble cause; he felt this, and was deeply hurt.

"If you like to put it that way," he said, flushing a little, "yes—I am in Dawes's tool-basket. I hope, however, it is not because I am vulgarly ambitious. I only wish to perform my highest duties in the best way. My only object in taking the vow was this—to serve the public well one should have no private interests. In any great governmental crisis one is too often reminded of the man in the parable who had married a wife. It is time some one realized, that self-

sacrifice is the only sure foundation for permanent success."

"H'm," said the Dowager; "very high-minded and most interesting. But the British Constitution does not present any opportunities for martyrdom; at present, no politician can be offered a worse humiliation than a peerage! But that is bad enough, I admit! I have once or twice thought very seriously of dropping my title; it has lost all meaning, and now it is so much more distinguished to be a commoner! But come, I want to introduce you to Jane. She will be charmed with your views; she, too, is full of heroic nonsense."

Jane was still playing when the Dowager and Warbeck came upon her.

"This," said the Dowager, "is your cousin Warbeck."

XII.

IN WHICH A LADY SPEAKS HER MIND.

When Warbeck dropped his cousin's hand, he gave a half-sigh. He never shook hands with either men or women when he could possibly avoid it : he regarded the act as a sign of friendship or affection—not one to be heedlessly given. This idiosyncrasy had made him many enemies, but enemies so created are not to be greatly feared.

Jane's hand was one of her charms ; it was white, delicate in shape, and, what was more, firm, and, what was more than all, very womanly. It seemed made to bestow blessings. Warbeck was extremely sensitive to moral atmosphere : some people made him choke, others gave him new life. He was, therefore, quick to appreciate the young girl's grace and purity, and to appreciate her was to remember his vow. So he half-sighed.

Jane was already what she had promised to be when De Boys left Brentmore—a girl of singular beauty. She had all the brilliance without the self-consciousness of Sophia Jenyns, and for that reason she was, perhaps, less striking at first sight. Sophia never permitted herself to escape attention. Jane did not care whether she was noticed or ignored ; she knew that she was far from plain, (for the pretty girl who is ignorant of her own comeliness does not exist), but

since she had resolved not to think of De Boys as a lover, she had lost all interest in her appearance. At one time, certainly, she had longed to find favour in his sight and so, no doubt, had sent many foolish wishes after the perishable and fleeting attractions of feature and complexion. But this was a weakness of the past—she would never be so vain again—ah, never! At the same time, when she saw her new cousin, she was rather glad that she happened to be wearing her most picturesque gown.

But in spite of the agreeable impression each had produced on the other, the Dowager found them both very dull during luncheon. Warbeck talked on prosaic subjects and rarely addressed himself to Jane. The Countess observed, too, with consternation, that he never once looked at his cousin, but kept his eyes fixed on his plate. She had never seen him so stupid. As for Jane, her shyness was most natural and becoming; she was a girl who could hold her peace without sinking into inanity. It was Warbeck who caused her ladyship uneasiness. Like most determined women she could only be discouraged by time—by the wearing off of enthusiasm, mere facts could not shake her purpose, nor opposition, her courage. The shortest-lived of her projects at least died a natural death, and was immediately succeeded by a direct descendant. Having made up her mind that Warbeck's marriage with his cousin Jane should take place in the autumn, her ladyship regarded his celibate vow as a mere piece of foolery; it had absolutely no bearing on the matter in point. But why was he so depressing in his manner? Had he no eyes? no ears? no taste? no manliness? With all his heroics

had he so little of the hero that he remained like a stock or a stone in the presence of girlhood and beauty? If this was the influence of Dawes of Balliol, the sooner that person was given a colonial appointment the better. He was not wanted in London.

When luncheon was at an end, Jane was obliged to leave them, as she had an engagement to drive in the Park with another new relation—a lady who need not detain us, since she was only remarkable for her visiting list. Warbeck coloured a little when he wished Jane good-bye. "I am afraid, too," he added, "we shall not meet again for some time. As my grandmother is so much better, I shall return to France to-morrow." He held the door open for her, and again half-sighed, as, having wished him a pleasant journey, she passed out.

"Warbeck!" said the Dowager, "surely you do not mean that? You are not going away again?"

"I have a great deal of work on hand," he said, with some awkwardness. "I am preparing one or two speeches and a short pamphlet, and I find I get fewer interruptions in Veronne. It is such a dull little village. There is only one man there I can talk to—Père Villard, the historian. And he is also there for quiet, so we only meet to argue!"

"But," said her ladyship—"but what do you think of Jane?" She could scarcely conceal her impatience.

"Your letters," said Warbeck, after some hesitation, "had given me no idea—but I have exchanged so few words with her. I certainly did not expect to see so —so—tall a girl!"

Lady Warbeck had frequently observed that a man's

language became ambiguous as his sentiments grew unmistakable. She gathered fresh hope.

"I wonder you think her plain!" This was a stroke of genius. It surprised him into candour.

"On the contrary, I think her lovely."

"H'm! But she is not silly with it—she is most intellectual."

"I am sure of it."

The Dowager looked at the ceiling. At some moments one can claim sympathy even from the inanimate.

"She will no doubt marry very well."

The young man frowned. "She is so young yet," he said. "Do not let her make any rash engagement, if you can possibly keep her free. It is so easy to bind oneself, and—and so impossible to escape the consequences. I mean, a promise may be made in all sincerity and after the most serious consideration, yet without fully realizing——" He paused. "I am only saying this," he said, at last, "because a girl takes so much risk—even in the most favourable circumstances—when she marries. Her very innocence is, in a measure, against her."

"It seems to me," said the Countess, drily, "that innocence is against a great many people."

"Not a *great many*, my dear grandmother," he replied, with equal dryness. He got up from his chair and walked to the window. Jane at that very moment came out of the house and stepped into the carriage. He watched her drive away.

"Yes," he said. "I can work much better at Veronne."

The Countess began to wonder whether a celibate

vow might not be a more calamitous invention than she had at first suspected.

"Warbeck," she said, "you will surely think better of—of this arrangement you have made with Dawes?"

"Think better of it!" he repeated. "The time for thinking about it is past. It is now an accomplished fact. My word has been given."

"But I am certain you will regret——"

"It is not a step I would ever allow myself to regret, nor would I place myself in a situation where I might be even tempted to regret it. I made it with the full knowledge that it might possibly involve some slight self-sacrifice. Dawes has been through the mill: he was most careful not to conceal any probable difficulty." He spoke firmly and fixed his eyes on hers with an expression which she recognized as the family stubbornness.

"Ah," said the Countess, quickly, "you think it would be safer to avoid your cousin Jane. That is why you are going back to Veronne!"

"What an absurd idea," said her grandson. "You must think me very susceptible."

"The Shannons are all alike," said her ladyship; "they are icebergs to all women till they meet the right one. And then they melt at a glance. Look at Jane's father—poor Edmund. He saw this Battle's daughter hanging clothes on a line, and fell in love with her on the spot. *Nothing* would make him reconsider it; his obstinacy was simply criminal. But in your case matters are very different. Jane is desirable from every point of view; there is no reason——"

"There is every reason," said the young man, "why we must change the subject. You must forgive me, but I cannot discuss it further."

"I will speak my mind," said the Dowager. "You are ruining your whole life for a whim—a fad—a piece of arrant coxcombery. It is not even religious—you have admitted as much. What can I call it, then, but affectation? In a year's time—less—you will be ashamed to remember it. But in the meanwhile——"

"In the meanwhile," said Warbeck, "I can at least be honourable. And now I think we have talked enough, my dear grandmother. You will be very tired."

"Tired? I am perfectly ill. You have given me my death-blow!" She sank back in her chair, and was evidently far from well. Warbeck knelt down by her side and took her hand.

"You would not have me behave dishonourably," he said; "you don't seem to understand. It—it is not always so easy to do one's duty; is it fair to make it harder? But it must be done in any case."

"Duty!" she said, peevishly. "It will soon be heroic to wear no collar! Foppery! twaddle! That a man in your position, with your responsibilities, with an unblemished title to support, should stoop to such indecent, mawkish, hysterical *balderdash!* It is scandalous!" She sank back again, but summoned her remaining strength for one last blow. "I have lived too long!"

"You are very cruel."

"I have lived too long!" she repeated.

"In a calmer moment, you will see how you have wronged me!"

"Too—long."

"Shall I ring for your maid?"

He was really alarmed—she had changed so much in the last ten minutes.

"Twenty maids could not help me! Warbeck—you have not meant—what you have been—saying?" Her voice was weak; she looked a very old and very feeble woman. And he loved her dearly. "Tell me—you did not—mean it," she repeated.

"I meant it," he said. "I must always mean it."

"But in the circumstances," she gasped, "this Dawes—he would absolve you from—your—promise."

"Dawes!" said Warbeck. "I do not make vows to Dawes—nor swear by Dawes. As I have said, you do not understand how extremely serious a vow of this kind is."

"You distinctly said it had nothing to do with religion," she murmured. "How can it be serious when it has nothing to do with religion?" Her failing eyes were only weak in sight: they could still pierce like needles.

"I can respect religious scruples," she went on, "but I have no patience with any Daweses of Balliols! It is noble, it is saintly to kill your aged grandmother for a Dawes. You do not believe in a God, but you will ruin your family for a Dawes who lives at Shoreditch! I am tired of life!" Once more she bowed her white head. "The country is going to the dogs—and Daweses!"

"My dear grandmother, will you listen to reason?"

"Reason?" she groaned. "Every bone in my body fairly aches with reason. Ring for Coleman, that I may get to bed!"

He had his hand on the bell when Jane entered: she had returned with some message for the Dowager. When she saw her ladyship's pallid face and Warbeck's distress she looked from one to the other and grew pale herself.

"Grandmama," she faltered, "are you feeling ill?"

"He has killed me," said the Countess, pointing to her grandson, "he has given me my death-blow. I shall never recover." She rose with some difficulty from her chair, and drew herself up to her full height.

"Lean on me," said Jane, with a nice disregard of Warbeck.

"No," said the Dowager; "henceforth I lean on no one. My staff has failed me when I needed it most. When I can no longer support myself, I must fall. Where I fall, there let me lie. Remain where you are, my dear, I will not be followed. Solitude now is my only refuge!" and this marvellous invalid walked out of the room with grave and majestic steps, leaving Jane and her cousin Warbeck face to face, and alone.

XIII.

IN WHICH ANOTHER LADY SPEAKS HER MIND.

JANE was now able to observe the young man more critically than had yet been possible, and the more she observed him, the greater effort it required to maintain her just indignation at his conduct. For, of course, he must have behaved most brutally. Had not his too fond grandmother implied as much? And if *she* had said so, what could a less partial witness think?

"I suppose," said the girl, in a severe voice, "you will at least remain in London until she is well enough to see you again? You cannot part like this."

"It is a most painful misunderstanding," said Warbeck.

"It is not for me to dictate," said Jane, in a tone of command, "but if it is a misunderstanding you will surely lose no time in making it clear. She is too old for these violent scenes. And she has had a great deal of sorrow and anxiety lately: perhaps she is not so patient as those who are young, and have nothing to worry them but their own want of thought!"

This authoritative and elderly tone in one so young and gentle astonished the Earl, no doubt, but he was so far from feeling any resentment, that he experienced some difficulty in hiding his admiration.

"I have been trying to make it all clear," he said, quietly, "ever since I arrived this noon. The only

trouble is, that she refuses to listen. I have tried to be patient, and I hope I have not spoken harshly. But I must do my duty whether she understands it or not. The quarrel has arisen—I fear we must call it a quarrel—about a question of duty—of honour."

Jane's cheeks began to burn : she feared he might think she was inquisitive. And inquisitiveness was not one of her faults.

"Please," she stammered, "please do not—— "

But he, too, was sensitive, and had very delicate feelings.

"I quite understand you," he said ; "I am only afraid you will not understand *me*. My dear grandmother has a genius for misrepresentation : she can describe what she sees with perfect truthfulness, but she does not see things as they are. In this particular instance it is most unfortunate. For honour has only one aspect : it is not a matter of opinion, but an incontrovertible fact."

"But she is so honourable herself," said Jane, eagerly ; "if you are in the right she must agree with you—she must. Are you quite—quite sure that you are right ? It is almost as easy to do wrong for a good motive, as to do right for a bad one. There are always so many reasons why we should follow our own wishes."

"On the whole," said the young man, slowly, "I may say there is no danger of any such confusion arising in this case : it is not a matter where my duty is—is perfectly my inclination. If it were not a question of principle—of moral obligation, I—I might surrender."

"May I tell her that you will reconsider it ?" said

Jane. "There could be no harm in saying that, because the more you consider what is right, the *righter* it seems."

"I cannot re-consider it," he answered, looking away—"I cannot, indeed; I only want to forget it all as soon as possible."

"Don't be angry with me," said Jane, "but for you—that sounds rather—rather cowardly. Oh, I ought not to have said that. I do not know the circumstances. I am always saying something thoughtless. Indeed, I did not mean it."

"You are quite right," he said, "and I am cowardly. But it is one advantage that I know my own weakness: I do not attempt feats beyond my strength." Yet he did not look weak, this man with a square chin and a firm mouth: anything rather than weak. Jane was bewildered.

"My grandmother knows my address," he went on; "but I will find means to hear how she is, even if she does not care to write to me. And—and tell her just this: if it were possible to accept her view, I would be more glad than I could say. But we are nowhere taught that duty is invariably delightful. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Jane.

When she looked again, he was gone. And she was sorry; for he had a winning countenance. If she had never seen De Boys she would have thought him ideally handsome. But De Boys was a king to him—although he was poor and not a person one might wear in a locket!

XIV.

IN WHICH TWO LADIES ACT WITHOUT THINKING.

SOPHIA had resolved to make some appeal to Wrath before the decisive Monday, but she could not resolve on a grievance. To assign jealousy as the cause of her discontent was out of the question. And, as a matter of fact, she did not want to analyze her feelings: she feared calmness as fire might dread water. She only cared to survey her imaginary wrongs with a poetic contempt for base details; she did not choose to torture her heart with questionings, nor demonstrate her husband's innocence by proving herself a fool. So, on Sunday afternoon, she wrote two notes—one to De Boys, the other to her husband.

This was the one to De Boys, which she gave him with her own hands, between the decorous covers of an hymn-book, the same evening:—

"You must tell them that you intend to walk to Barnet station early to-morrow morning, and leave by the eight o'clock train. Your portmanteau and things can be sent after you later. This will save you from the breakfast-table and tedious good-byes. I will meet you at the cross-roads, and we can discuss our future plans during the journey to London. Leave everything to me. For the present, of course,

you must return to Oxford and complete your education.—S. J."

This was the letter to her husband :—

" I have discovered a new meaning in life and a new duty. (Never believe that I will disgrace you.) My weakness—I had almost written my sin—has been my love for yourself. But we were not sent into the world to *love*. Subjectivity is fatal to Art : all great Art is objective. And love is subjectivity in its lowest phase. I use these philosophical terms because they are convenient, and because they are sufficiently comprehensive to cover all subtle—and perhaps agonizing—distinctions. I hope the Madonna will prove your *greatest* work. I will write to Margaret from town. Please tell her this.—Your unhappy Sophia.

" P.S.—I shall consult Sir Claretie Mull the moment I reach London. I am perfectly certain that I am consumptive. But do not worry about my health. I feel no pain—only a great sense of *approaching peace*."

She wept very much over this letter, and felt extremely like the heroine of a psychological romance. To complete the illusion she had taken care to attire herself in flame-coloured silk, made *à la sainte martyre*, with silver cords knotted round her waist, and opals scattered on her breast. She put out the light, and let the moonbeams stream in upon her. It was a grand situation. Musing on her own sublimity and suffering, she fell sound asleep on the couch. Fortunately, it was in the summer-time.

When she awoke it was morning—Monday morning—and half-past six. At that very moment, De Boys, no doubt, was leaving the house. She threw off her garments, plunged into a cold bath (which, perhaps, was unlike a psychological heroine), and dressed herself in clinging black. A large hat and a thick veil gave the final touches to her unimpeachably correct costume. Any fairly well-read observer would have known at once, that she was a misunderstood and cruelly injured woman, about to elope with her only friend.

She opened her bedroom door and peeped out: there was no one in sight. The servants, too, even did she meet them, were accustomed to the habits of celebrities on a visit. At The Cloisters nothing was remarkable but the commonplace. She passed two maids and an under-footman on her way to the room, which had been temporarily arranged as a studio for Wrath. But neither the maids nor the footman showed the smallest surprise when they saw her.

Sophia left her letter on the mantelpiece, and fled from the room through the French casement. Wrath had done well, she thought, to turn his odious picture to the wall: she could never have passed it else—the fascination of recognizing Margaret's nose was too engrossing. Under its enchantment, hours sped like minutes.

As she crossed the lawn she cast a glance over her shoulder at Wrath's window. The curtains were not yet drawn: he was probably sleeping—sleeping while she——

A sob—and then for the cross-roads, De Boys, and the Ideal.

Miss Eliza Bellarmine, having much to say on the burning question of Milton's precise meaning when he spoke of a two-handed engine at the door" (a phrase so beautifully imitated by a modern poet in the striking lines :—

> "At the door two hands are knocking—
> Hands of locomotive might——")—

Miss Ella Bellarmine, having much to say on this great matter, had arisen at crack of dawn to commit her criticism to foolscap. By half-past seven she had explained Milton for all time, and disposed of his modern imitator as "a person of vigorous imaginative faculty, but no education." Her task finished, she strolled out into the garden. It had been raining during the night, and she found herself observing footmarks on the gravel path. The marks were small, and had undoubtedly been made by Sophia Jenyns. No one else in the house wore such preposterous French shoes.

Now Miss Bellarmine was a lady who could put two and two together, and make any required number. She had not been blind to the sympathetic relations which existed between Mr. De Boys Mauden and Mrs. Wrath. (She was always studiously careful to think of the actress as Mrs. Wrath). As a consequence, she had thought herself prepared to see footprints—anywhere. Eliza had very cynical and, of course, very mistaken ideas about the artistic temperament. But in her secret heart, and very much against that grim adviser—her better judgment—she was strongly attached to the blithe Sophia, and now she saw that the footmarks had their ridiculous

toes pointed towards the carriage-drive, she was filled with an unreasonable, but very real alarm. She hurried into the studio by the same window that Sophia had left it some little time before, and her quick eyes went straight to the letter on the mantelpiece. She read the initials "T. W.," which were written on the envelope in an irresolute, childish hand.

A woman's instinct is rarely at fault ; it is only when she attempts to argue with it that she blunders. Fortunately Eliza trusted her instinct at that particular moment. She knew that De Boys had left The Cloisters that morning and after a somewhat mysterious fashion. Had Sophia gone with him ? If she had, she would surely repent before she reached London. She had been unusually erratic lately, and Miss Bellarmine held her own private opinion with regard to Sophia's state of health. It was extremely interesting—no doubt, trying—but not dangerous ; Lady Hyde-Bassett had the same private opinion ; so, too, had all the women of the household—from the housekeeper to the scullery-maid. But these, not knowing of Miss Jenyns's marriage, could only hope that the Lord would forgive them if they were mistaken—a pious wish which they repeated many times a day, together with their possibly wrong surmise.

Eliza's fingers wandered to the envelope. What folly might it contain ? what mischief might it cause, which neither repentance or explanation could unsay or undo ? What right had Sophia—in no matter how interesting a condition—to play such dangerous pranks on a man like her husband ? Did she deserve

to be forgiven? Eliza heard Wrath's voice in the distance, and without further hesitation she slipped the envelope under the clock. She would give the little fool a chance. If she did not return within two —three—at the most, four hours, Eliza knew that she could easily find means of bringing the note to light. And then she left the room, smiling. Perhaps she had been able to render Wrath a small act of friendship, and, although he himself could never know of it, this would be a great happiness for her to remember.

A few minutes later she peeped in at the window. He had entered the room and was looking at a sketch of Sophia which hung on the wall. Eliza stole away, feeling like a conspirator.

XV.

IN WHICH THE NEW EVE AND THE NEWER ADAM GROW ABSENT-MINDED.

De Boys stood waiting at the cross-roads when Sophia appeared in sight. He hastened to meet her, his countenance showing the decent, temperate, and subdued enthusiasm which befitted the pioneer of a great philosophical experiment. Sophia, most unreasonably, thought his manner cold—not that she would have seen him otherwise. The Ideal was founded on ice—eternal, Arctic.

"We are fortunate in our day," she said, in a quaking voice; "it is delightful walking. But I am rather tired. Is there any place where I can rest?"

De Boys looked about him; it was obviously impossible that she could rest on the ground, and on either side of them were high hedges.

"If you can manage to go on a little further," he said, "we may find a cottage—or something! But I am afraid we have not much time. The train——"

"But there are lots of trains," said Sophia, wearily, "and there is no hurry."

"Will you take my arm?" said De Boys. "We shall not meet any one, and if we do——"

She shrank back; the only arm she ever permitted herself to rest on, was Wrath's.

"Oh, no!" she said, "I hate taking people's arms!"

The young man coloured, and, in an aggrieved tone, murmured an apology.

"I do not wish to take a gloomy view of things," she said, with a certain severity, "nor do I want to be disagreeable, but I hope we are acting wisely. I hope we are not doing wrong!"

"I hope not," he said, with appalling seriousness.

She shivered, although it was a warm morning.

"Of course," he went on, "I obeyed your instructions, because a woman's tact is generally acknowledged to be the best in such matters. But I will not conceal from you that I could wish it might have been arranged a little more openly: I mean, without giving it this clandestine air which—which is not altogether pleasant. It looks too much like running away—and running away is low! Your note was most characteristic: it reminded me of our first meeting. Do you remember it? when you told me that you only saw the honeysuckle!"

He glanced at her sideways and thought she was not looking so much like Jane as usual. But she was still lovely—he could forgive her a great deal. Such is the magnanimity of the wise gander in his judgment of the endearing, if inconsequential, goose.

"Do not think," he said, "that I fail to appreciate your courage. You are only too dauntless! You do not see the dangers which would appal a—a more ordinary mortal. Oddly enough, after you had left the drawing-room last night Wrath said he had hoped to paint you as *Alcestis*—the ideal, courageous woman, you know, who died in her husband's stead."

"Oh!" said Sophia, faintly, "what—what else did he say?"

"He did not say anything else," said Mauden.

"How did he look when he said it?"

"He was looking at your photograph," said De Boys. His thoughts had wandered to the time when he had last walked on a country road at that hour in the morning. Jane had been with him then. How long ago it seemed! Did it seem so long to Jane? Was she, like all women, fickle? Had she forgotten him, in the pomp and circumstance of her new position? He drew a deep sigh.

"I mean," said Sophia, "was Wrath looking happy, or tired, or interested, or anything?"

"I think he was rather sleepy," said De Boys, "or at least I was. . . . Did I ever tell you how much you remind me of a Miss Shannon? She is Lady Jane Shannon now. But at one time I knew her very well."

"Really?" said Sophia. "You must tell me about her. . . . I suppose it would be considered a compliment to—to be asked to sit for *Alcestis?*"

"Undoubtedly," said De Boys—"undoubtedly. . . . Yes, as I was saying, you bear the most extraordinary resemblance to Jane. But while your hair is black, hers is a kind of russet gold——"

"Russet gold? How lovely! and so fashionable. . . . What did Margaret say when Wrath said he intended to paint me?"

"I don't think she said anything. . . . I wish you could know Ja—Lady Jane. She has so much originality. I am sure you would become great friends."

"Ye—es. . . . I suppose Margaret looked as though he ought to have asked *her* to be *Alcestis?*"

But De Boys did not hear: he was wondering whether Jane and Sophia really could become great friends. Would Jane quite grasp the Before-the-Fall Ideal? Would there be any difficulty in explaining——

"Of course," said Sophia, suddenly, "women *must* feel flattered when Wrath wants to paint them. To begin with, he is a very handsome man."

"Very handsome indeed!" sighed Mauden. He was thinking of Jane.

"He gives one such an idea of power," said Sophia; "the moment you see him you feel 'Here is some one to trust.'"

"Jane is the sort of girl, you know," said De Boys, "that—that you meet once and never forget. It is not merely because she is beautiful. Her beauty—which is very great—is her least charm."

"Indeed! I can well believe it. It is only within the last two years that I have realized how very handsome Wrath is. Is it not absurd? when I have been with him ever since I was born! But if you—care—for people, and, of course, I—care for him——"

"Naturally," said Mauden; "and it is very singular, but if you love people, you don't know what you love them for until you lose them. And then——"

"Don't say until you *lose* them," faltered Sophia, "that sounds so—awful!"

"It does, doesn't it?" said Mauden; "the sense of loss, of being, as it were, eternally separated, is very terrible. And death is not the only veil: sometimes our own folly . . . and when we have only our own

folly to blame it—it is so hopeless and so much harder to bear than——" Where was his fluency? his command of language? Could it be that as thoughts became real, words grew meaningless?

"We—that is Jane and I—grew up together," he went on; "we are not related, but it always seemed as though we were. I don't mean to say that we were like brother and sister, but——"

"I understand," said Sophia, eagerly, "it is the same with Wrath and myself. It is true that I have never regarded him as my father, but, as you say, a sort of relationship——"

"Have you left him any word—any explanation?" said De Boys, in a low voice.

"I wrote him a letter," said Sophia. "Not exactly the sort of letter one would write to a guardian, you know, but nicer! Do you think he will consider me ungrateful not to have——"

"I am afraid he may," said Mauden.

"I cannot tell you how generous he has always been," she said. "I would not like him to think me ungrateful. . . . Mr. Mauden."

"Yes."

"If you don't mind," she said, weakly, "I think I won't go to London to-day."

The young man tried not to look indecently thankful.

"But," he said, "you cannot go back alone. And your letter?"

"Luckily," she answered, "I did not mention your name in the letter. I can explain all that. He won't be angry with me." She burst into tears. "He has never been angry with me in his life! I wish now he

had given me one or two good shakes. I am so wicked! He has brought me up very badly—everybody says it!"

"Don't cry," said Mauden.

"I can't help it. . . . And I feel so ill. I haven't had any breakfast. I am not fit to be alone. My father was just the same: he killed himself; he never would think things over, and I am just like him; Wrath has always said so."

Mauden did not feel in a mood to gainsay Wrath's opinion. In fact, his reverence and admiration for Wrath's saintliness and long-suffering were increasing every moment.

"Suppose," he said, "we both go back to him and make a clean breast of it?"

"Oh, no!" said Sophia, "you mustn't come. I would not have Margaret know a word about it for the world."

"I must see you safely within the gates, at all events," said Mauden, with firmness. She had already turned and was walking at a rapid pace. Her fatigue was no longer apparent.

"You are not to come with me," she said, with her eyes fixed in the direction of The Cloisters.

"Pardon me," said De Boys, "but I must."

"I insist," said Miss Jenyns, "on returning alone. I will not be made ridiculous!"

He halted, took off his hat, and waited until she had advanced some yards in front of him. At this discreet distance, he followed.

"I will write to you," she called over her shoulder; "but I have made a great mistake. I shall be extremely ill after this!

He bowed again, but still followed.

"Do you wish," she said, at last, "to compromise me?"

"I cannot leave you unprotected," said Mauden, getting pale. He, too, had a temper.

"I came here alone, and I presume I can return alone. Please do not make me angry."

Matters were at this unhappy stage when they heard the rumble of wheels. Presently a grocer's cart appeared at the far end of the road.

"I will ask this man to drive me back," said Sophia. Then she gave Mauden a fiery glance. "We shall be the talk of the county!"

"Possibly, too, of London," he observed.

"You should not have exposed me to this," she went on; "it was unkind. Consumption is in my family, and it is well known that consumptives are not responsible for their conduct!" She hailed the grocer with a royal gesture.

"I have walked too far," she said, when he stopped, "will you kindly take me to The Cloisters?"

When she found herself actually seated in the cart, her customary good-humour returned. She lifted her veil and flung an artless smile to heaven.

"How my husband will laugh when I tell him!" she said.

Even months afterwards, Mauden was unable to explain her motive in making this astounding remark at that particular moment. When, however, in later years he confided the whole episode—together, of course, with every other episode of his bachelor career—to the wife of his bosom, (who, for the present,

shall be nameless), she explained it without an instant's hesitation.

"She referred to her husband," said the lady, "entirely for the benefit of the grocer's man! She was not even thinking of *you!*"

At which he could only look incredulous. But he was nevertheless impressed by the truth of her assertion.

XVI.

IN WHICH A FARCE IS PLAYED VERY SERIOUSLY.

BREAKFAST was always served punctually at nine o'clock at The Cloisters. As the clock chimed the hour, Lady Hyde-Bassett would descend the stairs, and woe to the guest who was not there to observe her freshness and vivacity. On this one point, she was as unreasonably severe as all malleable men and women are, who make up their minds to be unyielding on, at least, one subject. When she entered the breakfast-room, therefore, on that eventful Monday morning, and saw no Sophia Jenyns, her eyebrows began to twitch. Wrath was reading the *Times*, and Miss Bellarmine was studying a new novel, which dealt with the evolution of the soul from protoplasm to immortality—a work to be attacked when the mind was not predisposed to slumber.

"Where is Sophia?" said Margaret, having wished them both good morning.

"To be sure," said Wrath. "Where is she?"

"I think," said Eliza, slowly, "she has gone for a short walk."

"At this hour," said Margaret, "and without her breakfast?"

"Are you quite sure?" said Wrath.

"I believe," murmured Eliza, "she said last night

that she intended to try an early prowl. Did you not hear her say so ? "

It was very extraordinary, but neither of them had heard Sophia make the remark.

" But young Mauden——" began Lady Hyde-Bassett.

She caught a beseeching glance from Eliza, and felt a sharp step on her toe. They were now sitting at the table.

" Young Mauden," she went on, calmly, " was very wise to go by that eight o'clock train."

" I wish," said Wrath, suddenly, " Sophia would not wander about the country like a Tom o' Bedlam. I know she is studying *Ophelia*, but all the same, it is most annoying ! "

The two women dared not look up. But they were holding a conversation without words, which is not a difficult feat—although few mortals seem aware of it—when minds are sympathetic, and ordinary means of communication are impossible. To explain this mental phenomenon, however, is work for the metaphysician. We can only say that Lady Hyde-Bassett understood Miss Bellarmine so perfectly, that she lost her appetite for breakfast.

" Could not some one be sent to her room to inquire ? " said Wrath, rising from his seat, and oblivious alike of manners, his two companions, and general facts. Thought was swallowed up in sensation, and he recognized the sensation as fear.

" I will go," said Eliza.

" Thank you," he said ; " you are very good. Thank you."

When she had gone out of the room, he turned to

Lady Hyde-Bassett. "Margaret," he said, "do you think I have been blind this last fortnight? Do you think I have seen nothing?"

"Seen—nothing?" she repeated; "how?—what?"

"Do not act," he said; "be a woman—be honest. You have seen all that I have seen—perhaps more."

"No! no! not more . . . it was all very innocent . . . a childish flirtation. . . . I thought it best to ignore it. . . . I would not allow myself to give it consideration."

"Ah! that is what I thought. . . . The question is—Was I wrong? Should I have spoken?"

"No, no. You were right to trust her. The dreadful things we are both fearing are an insult—an injustice. Mauden is the soul of honour. Sophia is light-hearted, but—trust her. Only trust her!"

"I do . . . but . . . where is she now?"

"Do not ask me! Do not ask yourself!"

"Is she with Mauden?"

"No! no! no! how can you say it?"

"Why not ask me how I can say it—and live?"

She took his hand. "Tom," she said, "I would swear that she was innocent even if she told me with her own lips——"

"Innocent!" he said, angrily. "Am I so vile already? I want no man or woman to assure me of my wife's innocence. You know," he went on, after a painful pause, "I am naturally jealous. I—I try to conquer this. . . . I am so many years older than she is, and she is so . . . there is every reason why I must love her, and there are none why she should care for me . . . it would be absurd to expect her to sit gazing at me all day—me, bald, dull, plodding.

. . . Mauden is her own age, and amusing. . . . It was a crime to marry her: she was a child. She knew nothing about love. She has no idea how much she is to me. I could not tell her, it would frighten her . . . the responsibility——"

"Ah!" said Lady Hyde-Bassett, "why did you not speak out and risk the frightening?"

"I was selfish," he went on, not hearing, "and thought only of my own happiness. And I persuaded her—— Don't you understand how I must hate myself? Innocent! She is only too innocent. It is I who am guilty!"

"I wish," said Lady Hyde-Bassett—"I wish Eliza would make haste."

"She will not come back," said Wrath, "because she has found the room empty, and because she, too, thinks——"

Then he left her. And Margaret could only sit with her hands clasped, trying her best not to think. For thinking was not to be trusted at that moment. Faith—"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"—was her only refuge. For there is no virtue so sublime that it cannot be used with advantage even in a comedy situation.

When the grocer stopped his horse at the main entrance to The Cloisters, Sophia got down, gave the man a tip, and lurked under a tree until he had driven out of sight. Then she went out into the road again, and walked to a certain side-door which was cut in the wall of the kitchen-garden, and which was rarely used except by the servants and the men

employed on the estate. She opened this door and found herself face to face with the head-gardener.

"How unlucky!" she exclaimed. "I had just come in to steal some strawberries. Please don't give me any of them, because that would not be the same thing!" And, laughing gaily, she sauntered up the path. The gardener stroked his beard and stared after her. Had not his wife kept him awake the whole of the preceding night, with her "firm beliefs" and "dying breaths" on the subject of Miss Sophia Jenyns? And now she was hankering after strawberries. He whistled.

Sophia, meanwhile, went on her way, rejoicing that she had been able to make such a plausible excuse for entering the grounds by a back-door. She hugged the elusive hope that Wrath had not yet seen her nonsensical letter, and she was now wondering how she could get round to the studio, where, perhaps, if the Fates were kind, she would find the envelope with its seal unbroken. She glanced at the big clock which smiled from the archway of the stable-yard: it was exactly nine. They would all be at the breakfast-table: she could cross the lawn without the smallest risk of meeting either Wrath, or Margaret, or Eliza Bellarmine. Sophia caught up her skirt and ran. Once started, she did not seem able to stop; she had only a frantic notion that she was chasing her own head. The chase ended, however, when she reached the studio window. Her limbs grew heavy and her sight dim; she stumbled over the threshold, and groped her way to the mantelpiece. The letter was gone. She tore off her veil and stared helplessly about the room. Then some-

thing made her look under the clock. It was there, after all. She thrust the hateful thing into her pocket, and fell.

Wrath found her senseless on the floor when he entered the studio a few moments later.

XVII.

IN WHICH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN OWNS HIS UNWORTHINESS.

THE Dowager Countess of Warbeck was confined to her bed for some days after the unhappy disagreement with her grandson. Sir Claretie Mull did not, however, find in her symptoms any grave cause for alarm, and he told the young Earl as much, adding, that if he thought of leaving England, there was no earthly reason why he should not do so. His lordship, therefore, wrote the Dowager an affectionate adieu, expressing his regret that she would not see him, and assuring her of his unalterable love. With kindest regards to his cousin, Lady Jane, he remained ever her devoted grandson, Warbeck.

"Never mention his name in my presence," said the Countess to Jane, after she had read this; "when he repents of his impious conduct, I will forgive him. But until then my only course is to forget."

On the following Monday, she was still weak, but able to lie on the sofa. Jane was reading aloud to her when a visitor was announced in the person of "Mr. Mauden." He had asked to see Lady Jane Shannon.

"You cannot see him to-day," said the Countess, sharply; "it would be most improper. Tell him to come when I am strong enough to receive visitors."

"I am afraid I must see him, dear grandmama," said Jane, with a fine blush, "whether it is proper or not."

"What?" said the Dowager. "A little louder, my love. This attack has affected my hearing." And her blue eyes looked black.

"I said," repeated Jane, without flinching, "I am afraid I must see Mr. Mauden whether it is proper or improper. He is a very old friend."

"Oh!" said her ladyship—"oh! I remember now who he is. The farmer person who is going to be a schoolmaster. See the good creature, by all means!"

The Countess was always most triumphant when she was most defeated.

As Jane ran downstairs to the drawing-room she lost a little of her colour, but when she opened the door, and saw De Boys actually standing on the hearthrug, she grew quite white. He, on his part, blushed as he came forward to meet her.

She gave him her right hand and he took the other. Thus he held them both, nor did he seem anxious to release either.

"Jane," he said, "why have you got this beastly money? and why are you living at this awful Queen's Gate? and—why have you forgotten me?"

"I haven't?"

"But you have. Here is your last letter—all about the South Kensington Museum and Greek vases. I don't want to hear about Greek vases; I want to hear about you. Dear, dear, dearest, why have you got so cultured? why do you quote Browning? why do you write about ideals and all such tiresome rubbish? I would not give your old letters about the guinea-pig

for the whole of Tennyson! And you have got your hair done differently. Let me see whether I like it? Yes, I do. Are the sleeves meant to look like a bishop's? Jane, may I kiss you?"

"No," said Jane.

Perhaps he did not hear. At all events, it made no difference. And, indeed, she did not seem to think that it would. His kisses were becoming (from his own point of view) agreeably indefinite when she asked a question. This was the question—

"Did you leave The Cloisters very early this morning?"

"Shall we sit over there by that green dragon?" he suggested, gravely.

He chose a chair with its back to the light. Jane sat opposite with the sun shining in on her face. This, he felt, was as it should be. He did not like to see women afraid of the sun.

"I left The Cloisters this morning," he said, "and I return to Oxford this afternoon."

She checked a sigh; she certainly could not expect him to waste his time with her.

"Do you like Lady Hyde-Bassett?" she said, trying to look cheerful.

"Very much," said De Boys; "she is charming. But she is whim-ish, of course, like most women."

"And that Miss Bellarmine you mentioned in your last letter?"

"She has a fine figure, but she jaws too much. No one can get a word in, when she takes up an argument. I cannot bear these blue-stockings myself. Fielding's *Amelia* is, in my mind, the highest type of woman!"

"You used to say she was insipid."

"Ah, that was a schoolboy's verdict."

"And what about that Miss Sophia Jenyns you mentioned in your first letter? She must have been the most interesting of them all."

"Yes, I think one would call her interesting. In the beginning she reminded me—in a very faint degree—of you. But you have really nothing in common."

"I suppose she is very beautiful?" she sighed. "Grandmama says she is the loveliest actress in Europe."

"She *is* lovely—for an actress," he said; "there is a glamour about her which some people might find very attractive. . . . But I have nothing to say against her. She is rather uncertain in temper: not a woman one could depend on. She has no feeling. And what is a woman—no matter how pretty she may be—unless she has feeling? I would call Miss Jenyns an egoist; very fascinating, but for all that, an egoist. And egoism is, I think, the eighth deadly sin. It is the special sin of this century. But, Jane, don't let us talk of -Isms and -Ivities. I am sick of them, dearest. One heard of nothing else at The Cloisters. An enervating atmosphere! If I had been there another week I should have lost all ambition. I feel as though I had stepped from a window conservatory into the fresh woods. In God's name, let us be natural; let us drop jargon; let us only remember that we love each other—for nothing else matters."

"Are you sure you won't get tired of me? I am not clever and intellectual. I understand you, dear, but I cannot answer properly. It—it is horrid to feel so ignorant when you find yourself talking to—to

some one who is accustomed to meet geniuses, and men—and women—who can say something about everything, and just in the right way. Now I suppose if I tried I could say something, too, but it wouldn't sound a bit like the conversation in novels. I always think in such short words ! "

"The perfection of literary style—or of conversational style—is to be simple," said De Boys—"simplicity is delicious, and lamentably rare. I should hate a wife who could turn me into an epigram."

"A wife ! " she murmured.

"Dearest, you are the only woman in my world. The rest are your reflection ; when I see any beauty or charm in a woman it is because she reminds me of you."

Jane blushed. "I think I can understand that," she said, "because, after you had left Brentmore, I used to talk to Henry Burkett—the one who sings in the choir—and—and sometimes I used to forget, and think he was you. But I soon found the difference. You are not angry with me ? "

"Burkett is such a smug ! "

"But I missed you so terribly ! And I never looked at him when I could help it. When I did look I used to half-close my eyes. That made him more indistinct."

"Still, I do not care to think that you have flirted with men. If any one else had told me——"

"It wasn't flirting, De Boys. We only talked about books, and poetry, and religion, and things like that. I hope you don't think——"

"I am quite sure, dearest, that your intentions in the matter were beyond reproach. At the same

time, religion is rather an intimate subject ; I mean, it covers everything or anything. If you begin a conversation on religion there is no saying how it will end. It would entirely depend on the view you happened to take. For this reason, it is not a subject for a young girl to discuss with strange men ; nor, in fact, with any man except her husband—or some clergyman of whom he approved."

"A girl must say something," said Jane, whose meekness had its limit ; "what did Miss Jenyns talk about? She is only two years older than I am."

"Miss Jenyns," said Mauden, "is a woman of the world. Some day I will tell you more about her. But now I want to hear about you. I must leave in half an hour."

"So soon ?" said Jane. "I wish you had told me you were coming. I should have had so much happiness watching for you."

"I—I came here on impulse, my dearest. I—I—did not know myself that I was coming to see you when I left The Cloisters this morning. But when I reached London, I found I could not leave it until I had——" He stopped short, struggled with his conscience, and then blurted out—"Jane, I want you to forgive me for something."

"Forgive you ?" she said, "what have you done ?" and she kissed his hand.

"I am the meanest beast that walks," said her hero, blushing to his finger-tips—"I am, indeed. I do not deserve——" She smiled into his face with angelic disbelief. "I do not deserve you," he said, "and I have always known it." He sighed—"I am afraid we cannot marry for a year or two ?"

"Not for ages!"

"And then, there is your money!"

"I can give most of it to the poor relations. It will soon go that way. They want ever so many more things than I do! But you will be rich, too, when you are a Professor and write learned books. Or, if you are not exactly rich, you will be famous—which is much better."

"You have always believed in me. But if I fail——"

"You would never fail; you might be unfortunate. But then I could only love you more than ever."

"Write to me every day, dearest, and tell me that."

"How much do you love me?"

"I don't know," he said, solemnly; "and that has been the cause of all my trouble."

"What trouble?"

"The trouble I want you to forgive."

She put her arms round his neck. "Didn't you say," she said, "that nothing mattered so long as we loved each other?"

"It would never have happened," he stammered, "if she had not been so much like you."

"I know all about it," she said; "don't tell me any more—unless you like."

"But—how do you know?"

"I saw it in your face—when I came in."

"I shall never understand women!" exclaimed De Boys.

"I suppose," she said, "we *are* rather difficult."

"I never told her," he murmured, "that I loved

her. It—it was only sympathy. . . . And, Jane—never write me cold letters again."

"Do you think I could—after this?" said his affianced.

And so, I think, we may leave them.

XVIII.

IN WHICH SOPHIA WAKES UP.

MANY hours of pain and several weeks of dangerous illness were the result of Sophia's bite at the Ideal—a result which must not surprise us, since the psychological mystery she tasted is, as all pious souls know, the modern development of the antediluvian apple. But Sophia was young and had much to live for—much, too, to atone for. Tears had washed the dust from her eyes as only tears can, and, as she wept over her own folly, she knew that she was really crying for the first time in her life. Crystal drops shed over our own excellence are nothing in the world. They may, however, have their use in the city that is paved with good intentions.

Wrath watched day and night by the bedside of his wife. Their relationship was no longer concealed, for Nature, who hates false appearances, and is, in fact, a very blab to those who have ears to hear, had made straightforwardness necessary. And Wrath, in spite of his anxiety, was happier than he had been, even at his happiest moments, since the day of the secret marriage. He held his breath at the shortness of time before him in which to retrieve the two past years of dissimulation, of double-facedness. As all penitents, he longed to be born again, that he might wage a new life with the arts of an old experience. He blamed

himself less for keeping his promise to Sophia than for making it. The weakness, the moral cowardice of the matter lay, in his judgment, in the submitting to such a condition. It brought him no ease of mind to remember that the lunatic, the lover, and the poet were admitted by a charitable world to be more or less irresponsible for their follies. With all his faults he was not a man to lie pleasantly to his own conscience. He had acted wrongly, and he knew it ; what was more, he had been perfectly aware that he was acting wrongly when he gave the miserable promise. He had made up his mind to marry Sophia, and he had not been willing to run any risk of losing her. There was no condition so unwise, so ill-considered, or so desperate but he would have accepted it, rather than forfeit even one of her smiles. Such was the truth. (If a man cannot be a hero to his hired valet, we must not wonder if he looks small in the presence of his free conscience.) Fear, for the enormities he might have committed, was the other side of his remorse for the wrong, he had actually done. It was an awkward subject viewed from any point of consideration. But awkward as it was, it was even grateful in comparison with another matter, which haunted him constantly, and which seemed past forgiveness or hope. This matter was his conversation with Lady Hyde-Bassett on that never-to-be-forgotten Monday morning. It was contemptible enough, God knew, to have suspected his saintly wife of having eloped with Mauden ; but to have expressed the despicable thought in words, to have allowed the curbed jealousy of a lifetime to break away from all bounds just when control was most necessary—what

could he call himself? To think of all this in the long hours of the night, when Sophia was lying half-unconscious, or in pain, was a terrible punishment for his injustice, but he would not own that it was terrible enough.

One afternoon Sophia woke up from a sleep and found Wrath watching her. It was a daily experience, but on that particular afternoon she seemed to see him more distinctly than usual. He was looking old and careworn, and was so changed, that she found herself wondering whether she had not lost all idea of time, and whether her illness had lasted—not a few weeks as she imagined—but many years. She asked Wrath for a hand-glass,—she thought her hair must be grey.

He gave it to her in silence. She looked from the mirror to her husband, and from her husband to the mirror. Her face had not suffered so much from illness as his, from anxiety. She was pale in the cheeks, and a little dark round the eyes, but otherwise she seemed even younger for her suffering. She might have been a girl in her first teens.

"Tom," she said, "are you very tired?"

"Tired? Oh, no."

"Then talk to me. Tell me what you are thinking about."

"I am thinking of you," he said, quietly.

"Don't think about *me*—I am horrid."

This was quite in her old manner, and for a moment he smiled. It was a long-established custom between them, that she should call herself names, while he expressed his horror at the blasphemy. It was the usual prelude to most of their conversations.

"But I really mean it to-day," she said. This guileless and unconscious admission of the usual insincerity of her self-depreciation made them both laugh. It was Sophia's saving grace that she could, at times, survey herself from a distance. When she was not the first, she would at least be the second, to mock at her own extravagancies. But it may be that she carried this self-ridicule to excess, and saw her actions in a ludicrous light when they were rather sad than funny. Thus she had gradually lost all belief in her own earnestness. Sometimes it seemed that her love for Wrath was a jest, that life and death were alike jests, that the world itself was the Creator's big joke with mankind. Everything was so grotesque, so badly rehearsed. The curtain went up too soon and came down too late; parts were mumbled, or shouted, or gabbled, or left unspoken; cues were disregarded; heroes were knock-kneed, and heroines had thick ankles; fools made mirth with such a solemn air, and the wise were solemn so foolishly; men and women seemed not themselves, but their caricatures; it was all wildly comic, farcical, unnatural, and inartistic. The only sad part was, that one ached from laughing till one cried at the pain. But this, too, was a joke.

There was something inhuman, almost cruel, in Sophia's humour which made Wrath unhappy—all but fearful. Men, moreover, do not like their wives to have too clear a perception of the ludicrous—it is a masculine theory that laughter must be on the male side only. A man knows when laughter is a spoil-sport; he can postpone it when necessary. But a woman will laugh—if she know how—at the right

moment or the wrong, usually, too, when a man would prefer to see her demure.

Although Wrath joined in his wife's merriment on this particular afternoon, it did not seem to him that the occasion was especially amusing.

"Things are still so ridiculous," she said, suddenly, "but they are not ridiculous in quite the same way as they used to be. When I laugh now, I do not feel so much like crying. I know that what looks so absurd at present, will one day be very grand and beautiful. Some kinds of knowledge you cannot study—you find them when you are looking for something else. I have learnt all this by accident. I cannot tell you how. But I have learnt it so well that I can never forget it. . . . I shall never again be so foolish—so obstinate as I was. You will see such a difference in me! And, Tom—I want to tell you about my walk—that morning."

"No, no!" he said; "let me tell you something first. Will you ever forgive me? I—I thought you were with Mauden!"

The clock had never ticked so loudly: Sophia could hear nothing else. Or was it her own heart?

"I thought you were with Mauden," he repeated. "I thought you had gone to London with him. I—I was brutally jealous——"

"Tom!"

"I knew it was infamous. Do you think I will ever forgive myself?"

"But, Tom——" What would he say if he knew the whole truth? She could atone for her folly none the less because he knew nothing about it. Besides, he would lose all respect for her if she told him. He

would despise her: perhaps his love would change to dislike. Men, even the best, were not so forgiving as women.

"Tom," she said, desperately, "you—you were quite right. I *was* with Mauden—I *was* going to London with him, but—but I changed my mind! It was all a mistake. I thought—you were tired of me!"

She trembled for his answer. He had grown so pale; he looked so stern.

"You were going to London with Mauden?" he said.

"Yes."

"Why did you change your mind?"

"Because—I remembered *you*."

"You remembered me! That was thoughtful." He drew his hand across his brow and bowed his head. We have surely never such need to show humiliation as when we are in the presence of a fallen idol.

It is not the god, which was no god, that suffers, but its former worshipper, who sees what appeared divinity, corruption, and what looked strength, rottenness. And, in at least some slight degree, this terrible contemplation must be made by all mortals who place their entire faith in mere flesh-and-blood: who love the creature, which has beauty that we may desire it, more than the Creator whom no man hath at any time seen. One who wrote of human affection with a tenderness and understanding past comparison—who knew its infinite power and no less infinite weakness—one who has taught that by loving man we best learn how to love his Maker, has also warned us—"Keep yourselves from idols."

Wrath, in his hour of disillusion, had no words : the tragedy in common life lies in the thinking—not in the speaking.

The sound at last reached him of a woman, crying ; he looked, and though he no longer beheld a heavenly spirit, infallible and sinless, he beheld his wife.

"You forget—the circumstances," sobbed Sophia. "I was not well. And think how ill I have been!"

His frown vanished, but it left its scar. "My dearest," he said, gently, "whatever has happened, I know it has all been my fault! My fault entirely! I shall never cease to reproach myself."

"Let me tell you all about it," said Sophia ; and then between laughter and tears she confessed the whole story. "Poor young Mauden is not to blame," she wound up, "because he did not know I was married!"

"My fault entirely!" repeated Wrath. And what a relief it was to shift all her burden on his own shoulders! He was the transgressor—the brute beast with no understanding—she was still his angel of light.

"You are so good to me," she whimpered, "but I will never be so wicked again."

"There shall be no more of these detestable circumstances," he said.

"I don't mind them so much, if I know what they mean," said Sophia, "and next time, of course, I shall know! Some day I want to have a son, and I want him to be just like you!"

"It is impossible to look into the future," said Wrath ; "but if—by any chance—we had a son, I think he would be rather remarkable."

"He would be a genius," said Sophia.

"But he must have your face," said Wrath.

"No," said Sophia, "if he is not exactly like you, I shall be disappointed."

"I think," said Wrath, "we must make him a lawyer. He might become Lord Chancellor."

"Or he might be a Cardinal. Wouldn't that be nicer?"

At which moment, Lady Hyde-Bassett came in with some flowers for the invalid.

"Margaret," said Sophia, "if you had a son, would you rather see him a Cardinal or a Lord Chancellor? Because we were just saying——"

Wrath strode away to the window. And looking out, he saw a fair world. How wrong it was to be cynical! As if there was no such thing as earthly happiness. Away! away! ye philosophers of the mud-heap. The soul of man is a garden where, as he sows, so he shall reap. If ye would gather roses, do not sow rotten seeds. Away! away!

EPILOGUE.

WHEN Lady Jane Shannon attained her one-and-twentieth year she married the brilliant young scholar De Boys Mauden who, at present, is editing Plato as he has never been edited before, and never will be, again. As this magnificent enterprise will occupy some nine hours each day for the next thirty years of his life, we may safely assume that much fame will accrue to his literary executors.

The Earl of Warbeck astonished society by becoming first a Roman Catholic, and then a priest. This did not kill his grandmother, as many people feared it might, but she lived many years to enjoy the pleasure of writing wills in his favour, and revoking them at the rate of three a month. He also dined with her frequently, because, as she told her friends, she would never despair of converting him back to Christianity and the usual number of commandments.

Farmer Battle and Miss Caroline Battle are still living, and rank next in Jane's heart after De Boys and a certain small edition of De Boys. This young gentleman already holds a decided opinion on the due subjection of women to their lords : an opinion which Jane has her own method of refuting—a method so subtle, however, that Mauden has never yet been able to perceive it. He is only conscious that his wife's will looks so much like his own, that he is never able to tell which is which. He, at all events, gives the

word of command and she always wears an air of the most charming obedience. Why analyze such an harmonious condition of things?

Lady Hyde-Bassett lived long enough to see her dear Eliza married to Mr. Claverhouse Digges, the editor of the *Argus*. It was the last match Margaret made, and, as she declared, the most satisfactory. She died very peacefully—if rather suddenly—and her last words were, that she had never been so happy. It was quite impossible to mourn over one who showed such relief at leaving this world, and who enjoyed such a full and perfect assurance of the next. Her great wealth was left as a bequest to be used for the support of such scholars, authors, and artists, who preferred rather to do good work for nothing than bad work for large fees. The bequest is now managed by a committee, and it has not been of service to those for whom her ladyship intended it. But her intentions were good, and the starving scholars, authors, and artists who see the prosperous, incompetent, and dishonest making off with their treasure, have, let us hope, none the less gratitude for Lady Hyde-Bassett's benevolent design.

Wrath and Sophia have a small daughter, and now they wonder why they wanted a son. She is such an amazing and unique creation. They have named her "Margaret," after one they both loved—but Wrath especially. Had she not believed in Sophia when he himself had doubted her?

A BUNDLE OF LIFE

To

WALTER SPINDLER.

Ah, not for me—to learn the truth by dreaming,
To hear the cries of earth in melody,
To know 'tis night but when the stars are gleaming,—
Ah, not for me.

Music of form and colour's mystery,
The joy of fashioning in fairest seeming
Life's dullest clay and Winter's barest tree;

To count the years as moments—only deeming
That truly Time which makes thy Art to thee
The one thing needful and the all-redeeming,—
Ah, not for me!

September 23, 1893.

A Bundle of Life.

PROLOGUE.

I.

Sir Sidney Warcop was a gentleman who had been born with many good and perfect gifts, but he had pawned them to his Adversary for a few casks of brandy and a little soda. In his early manhood he had been considered a handsome, dashing young buck of the old school, a three-bottle hero, a sad dog, an irresistible rake—a good-hearted devil. Now he was reformed, and reformation had meant in his case, as in that of many, the substitution of many disagreeable virtues for a few atoning sins. Once over-generous, he was now frugal; once fearless, he was now discreet; once too loving, he was now indifferent; once a zealot, he was now unprejudiced; once candid, he was now abyssmal—in a phrase, he was the embodiment of gentlemanly correctness, well-bred honour, and polite religion.

At the age of six and twenty he had surprised society in two ways: first, by running away with his enemy's wife; and secondly, by marrying the lady on the death, some months later, of her distracted

husband. Eighteen years had now passed and, by living in close retirement, Lady Warcop was become a much-sought-after person. She had suddenly inherited, too, a considerable fortune, and as views on marriage are only immoral (as it would seem) when one cannot afford to pay for them, it was not so much a question whether her ladyship would be received, but whether she would receive. And she gave such delicious dinners! The early transgression of Sir Sidney and his wife was forgotten, and their daughter (whose age was a subject delicately avoided by the feeling and discreet world), was receiving her education in a convent abroad. It is possible that she would have remained there always and ended her life as a nun, but for the great interest most unexpectedly shown in her welfare by a rich and childless aunt —her mother's own sister—Mrs. Constance Charlotte Portcullis.

The heart of Mrs. Portcullis was, as it were, a moral scent-sachet, which she refilled with the fashionable perfume of each season, scattering the musk of the old year to make room for the myrrh of the new. This custom—which is commonly called Toleration —won for her numberless acquaintances of every rank and opinion, among whom it would have been hard to decide, which expressed his or her contempt for the lady's uncertain principles, in the most affectionate manner. Mrs. Portcullis had, nevertheless, one fixed and unalterable idea, and that had reference to Lady Warcop. She held that her appalling conduct had brought perpetual disgrace on that distinguished family the Tracy Tottenhams, of which she and her ladyship were members. Years passed and the sisters

never met. Mrs. Portcullis, of Belgrave Square, and Lady Warcop, of Curzon Street, were a new heaven and a new earth asunder.

They were brought together at last in a street accident. Mrs. Portcullis was thrown out of her victoria and driven home half insensible in Lady Warcop's brougham, which, by a dispensation of Providence or the interference of Satan, happened to be passing at the time of the catastrophe. On recovery from the shock Charlotte felt constrained to write to her sister in pious and forbearing terms—

"Since the Almighty," she wound up, "has, in accordance with His inscrutable Principles, chosen a weak and sinful agent for the accomplishment of His all-merciful design (the preservation of my life), I must accept this as a sign that He desires me to unbend from my former attitude of just, if reluctant, severity. If He has seen fit to forgive you for the disgrace and reproach you have brought on our once stainless name, my duty as a Christian forbids me to make any further comment on your crime. But I cannot refrain from adding that my unceasing prayers for your repentance have no doubt furthered, more than it would become me to say, this miracle of grace.

"I will receive you this day week between two and four.

"Your affectionate sister,
"C. C. Portcullis."

Like Lady Lurewell in the comedy, Mrs. Portcullis could dress up a sin so religiously that the devil him-

self would hardly know it of his making. It is certain that she deceived herself, and on reading over the foregoing she almost felt the prick of her immortal wings—which prick, as Plato tells us, is to the soul what the cutting of teeth is to the infant. But Lady Warcop's state of mind on receiving the letter, and her consequent remarks to the effect that Charlotte always was a hypocrite, a cat, and a fool, need not be insisted on here ; for, remembering Charlotte's wealth and several other matters, she wrote her reply in so meek and quiet a spirit that the hasty utterances of her unconsidering tongue shall not be known till the last Judgment. Although, as we have said, Lady Warcop had gained for herself a certain sneaking acknowledgment from so-called good society, her own sister's refusal to recognize her had always been a stumbling-block. There were still many desirable acquaintances who would not wink until Mrs. Portcullis winked, and this consideration was of such moment to Blanche, who only lived now to meet the right people in the right way, that, rather than miss the chance of reconciliation with Charlotte, she would have performed even a more severe penance than did Henry II. at the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. So giving much incidental praise to the Creator, but much more to Mrs. Portcullis, she wrote to say that she would call at Belgrave Square on the day and between the hours named in Charlotte's most kind letter, and, begging her to continue her fervent supplications to Heaven, she remained her devoted, if unworthy, sister Blanche. She displayed very correct taste, Charlotte thought, in omitting the ill-gotten name of Warcop.

II.

Lady Warcop was a woman of medium stature, elegant mould, and cautious smiles. Deep-set blue eyes and a very low brow, a nose inclined to the Roman, and a telling mouth ; a smooth, rather pale complexion and innocent fair hair were the most remarkable points of a countenance which fascinated reason and looked reproach at distrust. At least seven years younger than Sir Sidney, and of singularly youthful appearance, she affected an artless manner and displayed now that childish merriment not seen in children, and now that rudeness which passes for sincerity and is usually found in the disingenuous. A being with many emotions but no heart, with ideas but no thoughts, there was so little, even in her folly, to excite interest, that, in calling her stupid, friends said their best and enemies their worst of her character. But the strong force in Lady Warcop was her sex : weak, untruthful, cowardly, and malicious, she was still no more than woman may be, and it was no slight virtue—though a negative one—to have kept this feminine quality, to have retained—after a life of sham passions and passionate shams—that indefinable Eve-like pathos which from the beginning conquered —and until the end will conquer—the rigour of strict criticism.

Mrs. Portcullis, on the other hand, was big-boned, loud-voiced, and mighty, and so aggressive in her merits that she would have been more acceptable and pleasant for one of Lady Warcop's cowering faults. Her high, white forehead and long chin gave her a

grand and monumental air, which her widow's cap, crape robes, and such-like paraphernalia of woe made the more emphatic.

The meeting between these two ladies, who had hated each other so long and so cordially, was of the most edifying and tender nature. Blanche, who had intended to be dignified though pious, fell to miserable weeping, and Charlotte, touched by what she supposed was the sacrifice of a contrite heart, pronounced, goddess-like, a solemn benediction on Blanche's bowed head. Lady Warcop's tears, however, were those of suppressed rage and spite, and Charlotte's comfortable words, "I will make no reference to the past," sent her into fresh spasms of grief. She remembered every quarrel of their earliest childhood: how Charlotte had always been the "good" one, the "forgiving" one, the one "who would grow up a comfort to her parents," the one who conscientiously picked plums out of her cake because they were bad for her—which plums, by-the-bye, she used to drop on the plate of the less self-controlled Blanche. Not vainly, alas! But then, Charlotte did not like the taste of plums, preferring caraway seeds! The plum story loomed big in Lady Warcop's brain, and she howled—not for her own sins, but at the remembrance of Charlotte's treachery some thirty years before, when they both wore pinafores, and were only learning to be hypocrites.

"I would not have known you," sobbed her ladyship, "how you have changed! What trouble you must have had! Oh, Charlotte! and to meet after all these years—two old women! When I was last

in this room you wore a mauve silk and it went so well with your complexion—you used to have such a beautiful colour and there was not a line on your face—or at least there were only a few ; but now—who would think you were the same creature ? "

"You are more fortunate than I am," said Mrs. Portcullis, smiling horribly, "for you have a grown-up daughter to remind us of your lost attractions ! "

Blanche gasped, but although she felt the weight of Charlotte's blow she was not sufficiently skilled herself to appreciate its science.

"Oh," she said, growing red, "do you mean Teresa ? "

"Surely," quoth her sister, in a tone of horror, "there is but one I could mean ! "

Lady Warcop lifted her eyes and gazed as bravely as she dared at the miniature of the late William Duncan Portcullis which reposed on Charlotte's adamantine breast. This miniature, however, only served to produce in Blanche the kind of panic which we may suppose would fill any weak creature who saw scalps adorning the person of a warlike adversary.

"Tell me about Teresa," said Mrs. Portcullis, choosing the subject most humiliating to her sister.

"She is at school."

"I understood she was in a convent."

"Yes," faltered Lady Warcop, "there is a school in the convent ! "

"From a Romish point of view such equivocation, I know, is not considered disgraceful. Our religion, thank God, is not so easy ! You must send for her at once. She is, if I remember rightly, eighteen and a half, and, not to hurt your feelings, she can only

retrieve the lamentable circumstances of her birth by making a good marriage. Although we have not met, my dear Blanche, you have been ever in my mind, and the alteration in my appearance which you find so startling is, no doubt, miraculously evident to you because your disgrace has been its sole cause. Blessed with the kindest of husbands and a good conscience, I have had, nevertheless, a constant sorrow—that sorrow was my sister's shame. Oh! do not suppose I utter this as a reproach! I name it because I think my long years of grief give me the right to express a very strong opinion on the subject of your unhappy child's education and future. Your own sense will tell you that she must be guarded far more strictly than other girls. For instance, she must not be seen at balls, theatres, race-courses, country houses, or the like, but must rest content with dinners, oratorios, and good works for the poor."

"You are too kind," said Lady Warcop, who had listened with astonishing patience to her sister's speech, "but I do not wish Teresa to leave the convent at present. She is extremely happy there, and I can only wish that at her age I might have found such a peaceful home far removed from the temptations and wickedness of this deceitful world! As for her marrying, I have too much reason to regret my own early marriage—the cause of all my trouble—to wish the poor child to risk a similar mistake."

"You did not leave dear Douglas for a richer man!" said Mrs. Portcullis, in a tone which implied that if Blanche had made a more discreet choice, her sin would have been less odious.

"Perhaps not," said Blanche; "but I left a man who did not understand me for one who—— You know, Charlotte, that Sidney could make himself very agreeable. There were many women who would have been far readier than I was to run away with him. Indeed, he has often said that it was my resistance which chiefly excited his admiration, and if I had not been so firm on *my* side, he would not have been so determined on *his.* I saw that from the first, and I cannot tell you the *hours* we spent arguing the matter from every possible point of view. He used a great deal of persuasion (and you may be sure I would not have wasted a thought on him if he had not), but I took the final step with great reluctance. We may have been foolish, but we meant no wrong. I was unhappy; he was kind to me; we were both young."

"Sir Sidney was certainly young," said Mrs. Portcullis. "As for you, I can make no excuse on the ground of your age, for I always blame the woman in such cases, and, to my mind, it does not matter in the least whether she be sixteen or sixty. But it is a subject I must refuse to discuss with you, since, in the nature of things, it is inexpressibly painful to me. Let us return to the pressing and all-important question of Teresa's future. I would suggest that you send for her at once, and then you may bring her with you to a small dinner I am giving on the twentieth. The Dundrys, the Paget-Herons, and a few other old friends of mine are coming."

Blanche, who had been hopelessly hoping these many years for a smile of recognition from the Lady Dundry (known among her intimates as

"Arabella, dowdy, but exclusive"), no sooner heard that magic name than her whole demeanour changed. The little dignity and resolution she had assumed fell like a veil, and it was soon agreed between the two women that Teresa should be sent for on the morrow.

"The nuns must bring her to London," said Blanche, "for Sidney hates the Channel, and it is death to *me*."

Yet she had crossed it on the great occasion of her elopement.

III.

Four days after this interview between Lady Warcop and her sister, Sir Sidney might have been seen making his way towards Bedford Row. In person he was unusually handsome, his head and features reminding one in a striking degree of the popular representation of Cicero, while his extraordinarily brilliant blue eyes and lively hair did full justice to his Celtic origin. As in the case of Agamemnon, there were many men taller than he, but in a crowd he was not to be matched for grace and majesty of movement. There was, however, a certain studied ease in his gestures, a premeditated charm in his manner, which to those who disagreed with his politics made insincerity seem the sincerest thing about him. But if he had not a guileless soul, he had at least immaculate linen, which so dazzled the spectator by its purity that to a cynical mind it might have seemed that in this generation a good laundress is more useful than a clean record.

When Sir Sidney entered the private office of Mr. Robert Waddilove (of the firm of Waddilove, Shorn-

cliffe, Shorncliffe, and Pride, Solicitors), Mr. Waddilove rose from his chair, bowed, and remembered the time when he would have called on his client and trifled away a pleasant morning with scandal, choice cigars, incomparable sherry, and a "little matter of business," which came last and was invariably left "to your discretion, Waddilove." But now, oh heavy change! Even as the Baronet entered he looked at his watch.

"Not detain you ten minutes," he said, speaking rapidly, and as though he were dictating a telegram. "Not legal, but domestic. Wife most annoying. Teresa coming home. Wife in hysterics every time girl's name is mentioned. No living in the house."

Waddilove rubbed his chin. He was a man of middle age, short, but so compactly built that to look at him made one think of bricks and cement. His quick brown eyes were remarkable for their curiously mingled expression of shrewdness, scepticism, and good humour, and his wry mouth showed that if he drank in life like a worldling, he swallowed it like a philosopher. His nose was of the penetrating order, and seemed to have jutted prematurely from his forehead, which was broad and thoughtful.

His under-lip twitched a little at the close of Sir Sidney's remarks. "We will call this a friendly chat," he said quietly.

"Eh?" said the Baronet, with a radiant air, "not professional? Well, after all, it is not a legal matter. But you are quite sure? Still, between such old friends any question of business and that sort of thing is unpleasant. Conversation becomes restrained at once." He chose a chair, and sat in statuesque ease.

"You know what women are," he said.

Waddilove closed his eyes as though he would exclude a painful vision.

"You know what my wife is," continued Sir Sidney.

The lawyer looked grave, in the formal manner appropriate to the discussion of family skeletons—a manner not so much indicative of pity, which might verge too much on the familiar, as of concern—disinterested, brain-felt concern.

"I have nothing to say against Lady Warcop," said her husband. "She has many excellent qualities, but on the subject of Teresa she is a—what-do-you-call-'em ?"

"An enigma," suggested Waddilove, but in a voice so modulated that had the word been unwelcome it might have passed for a cough.

"That is the thing," said Sir Sidney, "an enigma. And to turn against her own daughter, her only child ! She has not seen her since she was born ; there has always been some excuse. But now she has suddenly sent for her, and God knows why, for no sooner had she written the letter than she declared she would not have her in the house. Damn it all ! it is *my* house and *my* daughter ! When a man cannot have his own way in his own house, then—then it comes to this—somebody must give in. If I say, 'Blanche, I am going to put my foot down,' she begins to cry. She says, too, that her hair is turning grey with silent worry. And you know, Waddilove, she is never silent, and she is no longer so young that a grey hair or two seems extraordinary. But there are quarrels between us from morning till night, and I cannot allow it. Life is not worth living. Why

did she send for the girl if she did not want her? Where's the consistency? As I told Blanche this morning—'Blanche,' I said, as kindly as possible—I did not want a scene, as you may imagine—'Blanche,' I said, 'if you will tell me why you sent for Teresa, in the first place'—— But, God bless your soul! before the words were out of my mouth she flew at me like a tigress. And what do you think she said? 'What! do you begrudge your own child her rightful home? I suppose you do not wish to be reminded of the past. For it was all your fault, although I have had all the blame.' Imagine her referring to dead and gone matters in that offensive manner! And she was the one who had been abusing the poor child—not I. I ask you what could any man do with a woman like that?"

"It is a very difficult question," said Waddilove.

"And there is nothing to be gained by a separation," said Sir Sidney, "because she is so unreasonable, and can neither make head nor tail of the law. There is no peace for me this side of the grave."

"What does Lady Warcop suggest?" said Waddilove. "What are her wishes in the matter?"

"God knows!" said Sir Sidney. "If I knew what she wanted we might come to some understanding. But one moment she says one thing and the next another. My health will not bear it much longer. What do you advise me to do in the meantime?"

"You must be firm," said Waddilove.

"Impossible; quite impossible. Whenever I speak firmly she begins to cry. You see, she is a gentle, sweet-tempered sort of woman by nature. One does not like to be brutal."

"Have you tried persuasion?"

"I have tried everything—coaxing, threatening, commanding, and exhorting; jokes, presents, theatres, and sermons; reading, singing, playing, and, so far as that goes, praying. No husband could do more to make his wife happy—unless, indeed, he blew his brains out!"

"I am afraid," said Waddilove, "you must make up your mind to endure these annoyances."

Sir Sidney sighed heavily and rose from his chair. "Before I married her," he said, "she was as mild as an angel. She was a little contrary now and again, but one kind word, and she would do anything. Douglas Cockburn never understood that, and tried bullying. Now I see, however, that there were faults on both sides. Of course, I would not say as much to any one else. This is a judgment on me, Waddilove, and if I did not know it was a judgment I could not bear it another day. As it is, I will face it out to the bitter end. Good-bye."

He left the office with the uneasy idea that he had been talking too freely, and, as a consequence, he began to hate Waddilove as a prying, impertinent fellow—a fellow to be avoided. What right had he to ask so many questions? But it had been a relief to speak out: to utter his feelings; to rid himself even by a straw's weight of that load of sorrow, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and weariness, the bearing of which, after all, proved that his poor fragment of a soul had still its use in the scheme of salvation.

IV.

Lady Warcop, meanwhile, was pacing the floor of her boudoir. In her hand she held the photograph of a singularly plain little girl, who stood in a cork grotto staring at a stuffed dog. This portrait of Teresa had been taken some ten years before, and Blanche had lacked the courage to send for another. And now, without warning, to be obliged to present *this* to the world! It was too hard, too bitter, too outrageous. Was ever woman called upon to suffer such mortification? As for motherly feelings, what were they? How could she love a creature she had never seen? Some one had once shown her an infant, but she had felt too ill to notice the piteous object. She did not even understand that it was her own. There was so much cant and nonsense talked about maternal instinct. A cab drove up to the door; with a cry, her Ladyship rushed to the window. Thank goodness, it was only Sidney. What suffering! What suspense! One more day like this, and she would be on her deathbed.

"Ah! so you have come at last, Sidney?" Where had he been all the morning? She made few demands on his time, but she certainly thought that in common decency and merely for the sake of appearances he would have remained with her to receive poor darling Teresa. It was true that she had not yet arrived, but this did not alter the fact that he *might* have missed her. Poor child! a stranger in her own father's house! But the world was a cruel place, and she, for her part, was sick and tired of it. If it were not for Teresa, who

needed a mother's care, she was by no means sure that she might not seek a speedy way out of it. Suicide, of course, was wicked, but God was never hard on women. He understood them : men did not. . . . Was that the bell ?

"Go and meet her," said Blanche. "Try and look affectionate. I want the poor little thing to think we are glad to see her. As for me, I feel too ill and extraordinary to move."

As she spoke, however, the door was opened, and two nuns, followed by a young girl, were ushered in. Her Ladyship flushed and paled, and, without speaking, with tears raining down her cheeks, took the girl in her arms, tenderly, closely, as only a mother can.

Sir Sidney rubbed his eyes, almost fearing to rest them on a scene so beautiful, so new in his experience. Blanche seemed to him transfigured, and he saw in that brief moment the woman she might have been : all the fair ambitions she had forgotten, all the good impulses she had not obeyed flashed their pure light on her countenance.

Like some guilty creature, he left the room. He was the only sinner there.

CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK.

Lord Twacorbie.

Sidney Wiche, M.P., *Proprietor and Editor of "The Watchman."*

Nicholas T. Van Huyster, *an American millionaire and poet.*

Captain Saville Rookes.

Sir Ventry Coxe, *a widower.*

Lady Twacorbie, *his sister.*

The Hon. Felicia Gorm, *her step-daughter.*

Teresa Warcop, *an heiress, cousin to Lady Twacorbie.*

Lady Mallinger, *a very young widow.*

Luffy, *the head-gardener.*

Spalding, *the butler.*

Mrs. Danby, *the housekeeper.*

The scene is laid at Arden Lodge, the country seat of Lord Twacorbie, in Mertfordshire. The action takes place in the course of twenty-four hours.

"*One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*"

I.

The dining-room in Arden Lodge was superbly furnished with a silver chandelier. This splendid object was of such incomparable interest that Lord Twacorbie, who was a man of taste no less than an economist, had the walls which formed its background, bare, the floor beneath covered with a plain drugget, and the tables and chairs in the apartment of the simplest design. On the same artistic principle, he gave large dinners, at which the rarest, indeed, unheard-of delicacies, (which were as disagreeable to the palate as they were interesting to the explorer and antiquarian), formed the brief but sufficient menu.

On a certain evening in the early spring of 189–, one of these dinners had taken place with unusual success, possibly because most of the thirty guests were persons of importance, probably because some roast mutton had, by a new cook's judicious mistake, formed a vulgar but stimulating addition to the choice viands of the banquet. The ladies had left the table, and the fifteen men who remained sighed, some with relief, some with regret, some from the force of example, and some because they could dine no more that day.

Lord Twacorbie was a gentleman whom food did not nourish, and whose airy shapelessness made him seem in some way symbolic of the universe when it was without form, and void. To-night he fluttered

a smile like the sun's on a March morning, and surveyed the company with the feverish gaiety of one who is too seriously bored to risk showing languor. He was of all men the last to entertain a table, yet few attempted the task so often, and no one could have been more ignorant of his failures. He started a conversation on the Early Marriages Bill, and quoted, with inspired inaccuracy, a speech recently made on that subject by his friend, Sidney Wiche. Wiche, who happened to be present, endured his host's recital with the air of one accustomed to suffering; at its close his countenance had something humorous, pathetic, and sublime—St. Lawrence on the gridiron saying, "Turn me! This side is done!" must have looked just so. The editor of *The Watchman* was a man of slender frame and with fewer inches than the ordinary; a small mortal whose boundless spirit—imprisoned yet not impatient for release—gazed through his eyes. His pale face, dull brown hair and duller beard, and the absence in his manner of all that marks the creature of many fashions and one epoch, had made him more famous for his insignificance than any of his contemporaries for their distinction. He was about seven-and-thirty, and hard work had made him look much older.

Two men who sat at the far end of the table seized the advantage of their position, and, talking in undertones, studied him with lively interest.

"Of course, he is clever," said the elder of the two; "or, at least, he is a great man for the mob. There is a distinction between greatness and being great in the eyes of a *certain class*." The speaker,

Sir Ventry Coxe, had the so-called aristocratic air sometimes found in men of middle-class extraction, but unknown amongst the old nobility. Very young girls, sentimental women, and men of his own stamp, thought him extremely handsome: his features were bold and well-defined, his dark eyes could express any drawing-room emotion with really excellent effect; his thin, straight lips suggested his refined tastes to those who understand culture as leanness and vulgarity as curves.

"What do they think of Wiche in America?" continued the Baronet.

"They wonder that he does not marry," replied his companion; "there are so many pretty women in England."

Mr. Nicholas T. Van Huyster was a young man about eight-and-twenty, tall, slight, dark, and clean-shaven. His face was not at first sight sympathetic, but, on the other hand, he did not have the aggressive air of one who is conscious that he must be known to be appreciated.

"Wiche is not popular in society," said Sir Ventry. "He has no presence, no manners, no small talk."

"No," answered the American, "he is not that modern of each May so beloved of dining London."

"His family is nothing," said Sir Ventry. "His mother was a person of no education, who lived with an art-critic called Wiche. By-the-by, can you imagine a more miserable occupation than this scribbling about art? What is Art? Madness in most cases, and mere frippery in others. And only one man here and there makes it pay. Look at Nature, I say, if you want beautiful pictures. But

I was telling you about this fellow. It seems he was christened Sidney Wiche ; his mother said that his name was at least Christian if it was not legal ! I am thankful to say I never met her. I do not pretend to be a saint, but a woman without a conscience strikes me dumb! I feel that there is nothing more to say ! "

"Conscience is the name which the orthodox give to their prejudices," said Van Huyster. "But have you ever heard," he went on, drawing out his pocket-book, "that Wiche's father left a very eccentric will ? I received this from New York last night." He handed a newspaper cutting to Sir Ventry, who read the following :—

"*Sidney Wiche was to be first a Christian, then a scholar, and in course of time a philosophical politician. He was not to marry, 'but,' ran the strange document, 'should he feel drawn towards the married state let him give the matter his best consideration for a no less term than five years, since marriage is of all subjects the one most darkened by fallacy, falsehood, and false sentiment.' During this period of prayer and reflection he was to read 'neither poets nor romancers, but St. Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman, and the great historians, who, between them, would so satisfy his soul, his manliness, and his common-sense that after their company any feminine prattler would seem a plague rather than a treasure.' He was to shun 'as he would the devil, learned ladies, ladies with artistic gifts, ladies who talked religion, and ladies who were not ladies!' In conclusion, he was earnestly exhorted to practise the pious exercise of meditating for two hours daily on his own nothingness !*"

"Very interesting," remarked Sir Ventry; "but interesting things are never true."

"And the truth is only convincing when it is told by an experienced liar," observed Nicholas.

"Old Wiche has been dead for some time," said Sir Ventry, "and I never heard that he left Sidney either means of support or instructions; it ought to be made known if he did. One likes to hear that a man has behaved like a gentleman in such matters. Unfortunately, he died abroad, and his affairs were managed by these Italian scoundrels. One can get nothing out of them. I must say I like English straightforwardness."

"*The Watchman* must bring in a large income," said Van Huyster.

"Undoubtedly," replied Sir Ventry. "But what a rag the paper is! These Radicals are ruining the nation."

"I thought Wiche was a member of your own party."

"My own party," said Sir Ventry, "is not necessarily my own politics! As a man," he went on, after a pause, "I like the fellow well enough, and now that he has pushed his way into the world we all try to forget his origin. But with every desire to be fair, I cannot bring myself to regard him as a suitable match for any relative of my own. It is only too well-known that he admires my sister's step-daughter, Miss Gorm."

"That does not surprise me," said Van Huyster, fetching a deep sigh, "she is lovely. Her face is so bright yet so delicate—a star wrapped in gauze!"

Sir Ventry dropped his lower jaw, but recovered it

on remembering that the millionaire wrote poetry, very bad poetry, too. "Felicia is certainly good-looking," he said; "perhaps you are aware that her mother, the former Lady Twacorbie, was an American. She made Twacorbie an excellent wife, however, greatly improved the estate and was very much liked by the Royalties. She died young."

"Good wives so often do," murmured Van Huyster, "perhaps that is one of their brightest virtues."

Sir Ventry abhorred anything in the nature of satire—it seemed to him a convenient name for offensive and unmistakable allusions to his own character and career. On this occasion he wondered whether Van Huyster was aware that he, too, Sir Ventry Coxe, had in his day buried some sixty-three inches of weary perfection. He decided to ignore the remark.

"One can see," he said, "that Felicia is extremely un-English: her manners are a little crude. But I like a woman who can talk: a man wants to be amused, he does not want to wear his brains out amusing a wife!"

At this point Lord Twacorbie rose up from the table.

The pantry was immediately behind the dining-room—and here, at the close of the dinner, Spalding, the butler, the head-gardener, Luffy, and Mrs. Danby, the housekeeper, were engaged in conversation of an even more instructive nature than that indulged by Lord Twacorbie and his distinguished company.

"Who came down from town this evening?" asked Luffy.

"Sir Ventry, Mr. Wiche, Captain Rookes, and this new American, Mr. Van Huyster," said the housekeeper.

"And who are the women?" continued Luffy.

"Miss Warcop for one," said Mrs. Danby. "Between ourselves her ladyship is on the matchmaking hop again. But there—when did she ever pull anything off what you may call satisfactory? She's too hopeful. And say what you like, Luffy, it doesn't do to be hopeful in this world. Expect nothing, I say!" The widow shook her head, and heaved her breast, and hurled a poignant glance at Spalding, who had been shuddering on the brink of matrimony for twelve and a half years.

"It might be a very good thing for Sir Ventry if Miss Warcop would have him," said Spalding; "but the question arises in my mind, will she? If she would take my advice she would stay single!"

"Everybody is not so wrapt up in theirselves as you are," said Mrs. Danby, tartly.

"If I was a woman," murmured Spalding, in a weak voice, "the man doesn't live that I would sacrifice my peace of mind for. Men are not worth so much thought. The devotion of women is something awful to think of."

"It is," sighed Luffy, whose wife had a jealous temperament, "it is."

"I can say this much," said Mrs. Danby: "when Miss Warcop marries she will not choose a conceited, self-seeking, cold-hearted, unfeeling *half-a-man* like Sir Ventry! I would not look at him—no, not if he draped me in diamonds from head to foot! Mr. Wiche is the man for her."

"Not he," said Spalding, "he's got his eye on Lady Mallinger."

"If he was to roll his eyes at Lady Mallinger from now till Doomsday," said Mrs. Danby, "I should still say that he and Miss Warcop were made for each other. And, what is more, they will marry. Whoever lives longest will see the most. I know what I know. If God Almighty intends a couple to marry that marriage will come off. The man can't help himself. Just you bear that in mind!"

She left them, and neither of the men had the courage to smile. They talked instead of the new Cemetery, and grew cheerful on the subject of coffins.

II.

Arden Lodge in Mertfordshire is a large, white building surrounded by beautiful grounds, and facing the finest scenery in the county. This is saying a great deal, for although Mertford is flat and not at all wild or what is called romantic, its rivers and fields, gardens and woods, toy-like farms and shady parks are, for their kind, the prettiest in the world. And one can only find such peculiar prettiness in England; it is so well-disposed, calm and unsuggestive—inspiring neither passionate sentiments, nor unearthly music, nor flaming words, but what, in some opinions, may be better than all these—a dreamless, ineffable drowsiness.

On the morning after the dinner-party, a lady and gentleman were strolling on the Terrace which led by wide steps on to the lawn of Lord Twacorbie's residence. The lady was Miss Warcop: her escort was Sidney Wiche.

Teresa was no longer in her first youth, and she had never been pretty: her oval face was colourless, heavy black eyebrows overhung her hazel eyes; mouth, nose, and chin were too obviously mouth, nose, and chin. She was remarkable, however, and only needed a reputation for wickedness to make her considered curiously fascinating.

As these two came down the steps, they were commenting on the weather, the unusual warmth

seeing it was but Easter, and the freshness of the air. When they reached the lawn, they walked in silence to a seat, sat down and stared at the landscape. They were evidently old friends.

"Well," said Wiche, at last, "is the most practical woman in the world, dreaming?"

"I was thinking of you," she answered, looking at him with such frank, unclouded affection that he blushed to think how little he deserved it. He might have made some answer, but as she spoke they both heard the rustle of silk skirts: the sound grew nearer: at last a lady, charmingly attired in a gown which suggested grey vapour and sunlight, approached them. She presented a strange effect of brilliance, fragility, and mistiness: her features were soft, and her head in profile seemed rather a shadow in the air than something real or human. But the shadow was plainly womanish—one could never have mistaken it for an angel's. Her skin was fair, her hair light brown, her eyes blue, sapphirine, deep, a little troubled: she gazed at Wiche, he gazed at her; Teresa watched the meeting with some uneasiness.

"I did not know that the glare was so great," she said, faintly; "I should have brought my parasol."

"Let me fetch it!" said Wiche.

She thanked him as, with an admirable semblance of good humour, he left them.

"You met Mr. Wiche some years ago, did you not?" Teresa asked, turning to Lady Mallinger: "did you know him at all well?"

"That would depend on what you call *well*," said the younger woman. Her voice was strangely melodious: to hear it was to think of the fabulous

singing of fabulous sirens. If she babbled of brick-dust, one thought only of lute-strings. For this reason she was never quoted accurately.

"I mean," said Teresa, "were you great friends?"

"I should not say that."

"I thought I saw him looking at you rather often during dinner last evening."

"Did he?" said Lady Mallinger. "I hope my hair was dressed properly. My maid is in love just at present, and she makes me quite frightful. It is not that she is malicious, but Love is so distracting." Smiling sweetly, she looked first at the trees, then at the grass, and finally at Teresa. "In some ways," she went on, "I am rather sorry to renew Mr. Wiche's acquaintance: we have nothing in common—absolutely nothing. He has the instincts of a Turk: he does not believe in a woman's intellect. Sometimes I wish I really was stupid and lived in a harem!"

"My dear!" said Teresa.

"I do, indeed: women were not made to struggle and strive. They ought only to be fed and clothed and petted. But I thought otherwise once. Before my marriage I was anxious to work out a career: I wanted to be artistic: I thought I might become a famous actress. Ah, to think of those days when I was hoping and dreaming, when my thoughts were my achievements, when the future seemed so far and the present so eternal!" Her voice trembled, she flushed and then grew pale: one could imagine that she was struggling in a very hurricane of lost possibilities. "But when work began in earnest," she continued, "when art became a task, and dreaming, waste of time, I confess I grew sick of ambition. I only

wanted to sit idle in the market-place. And so I married, and danced, and dressed, and chattered: I gave up thinking—it made me too miserable." Teresa had an extraordinary power of winning confidences: perhaps because she rarely talked.

"A woman's mission is to play the fool," continued Lady Mallinger, "and that is why she can only lead a man so long as she does not love him. On the instant she loves, she must be honest or die: she loses all discretion: she quarrels when she should cajole, smiles when she should frown, utters ugly truth when she should tell pretty lies: she cannot flatter, she cannot pretend—in fact, she can do nothing but love—and that beyond sense." Commanding was not the word for Lady Mallinger's manner: yet there was that in her air which insisted, which brooked no denial, which said plainly enough: "What I think must be, because I was not born to be disappointed!"

"I do not agree with you," said Teresa, "because if I loved a man I would have no desire to lead him. I could only pray that I might not prove his stumbling-block, and that we might help each other to do right rightly. Life is so hard to live alone."

"Oh, if I only dared to be natural," exclaimed Lady Mallinger; "if I only dared to tell all I think, and feel, and know. If I could only drop this tedious gossiping and grinning! I am not tired of living, but I am tired of my body—of this mummy-case. When I was a child, I felt old; now I am a woman, I feel young. I want to go back to the youth of the world: I want the time when love was the only happiness, and folly the highest wisdom!"

"Did you ever talk like this to Mr. Wiche?" said Teresa.

"Of course not," said Lady Mallinger. "I only talk nonsense to men!"

"Dear me! Yet I daresay they like it. But I promised to show Mr. Wiche the primrose path. As you do not care for him, I will meet him half-way. See! he is coming now." She rose from her seat and hastened across the lawn in the direction of the house. Lady Mallinger sat smiling to herself: she had never suffered from jealousy, and she thought it the drollest of passions. She was on the verge of laughter when Captain Rookes appeared on the Terrace. He was undeniably handsome: his features had that harmonious irregularity which is so much more like truth than beauty, so much more life-like, sinner-like, and love-like than perfection. His eyes flashed fire and sentiment—youth lacking either is dull—melancholy had added a force to their magic.

"Are you sure," he said, anxiously, as he approached Lady Mallinger, "are you sure that it is discreet to meet here where every one can see us?"

"Of course," said her ladyship, whose whole bearing and manner changed, and who now assumed an infantile, prattling, and pouting simplicity; "of course, I hate out-of-the-way corners."

"Speak a little lower, darling," said Saville, "there may be some gardeners about."

"That would not matter."

"Not matter? My dear Lilian, you do not know the world. If the world knew how much we loved each other, it would grow suspicious."

"Why? Numbers of people love each other."

"Yes," said the Captain, "but we are not like other people. I love you too well to ask you to marry me and so drag you down to a miserable shabby-genteel existence."

"I do not mind being poor, Saville," said Lady Mallinger, eagerly. "Before my marriage, Papa only allowed me sixty pounds a year for my clothes, and every one said how well I managed. That, I know, was as a girl, and, of course, a married woman has to dress more—in a sense—but a handsome mantle goes a long way. Lady Twacorbie has worn that satin and lace thing at least four seasons: she has had the sleeves altered, and it has been re-lined with a different colour, but it is the same cloak! And I am tired of marrying for money: it is not as though I had not tried it. No one can say that I gave the least trouble when they married me to Charles—although I never did admire red hair, and he was the worst dancer in his regiment. I know he was most civil to poor Papa, but after all he was not so rich as they thought him, and it would have been wiser, perhaps, if I had remained single a little longer. But *you*, Saville, I could be poor with you: you are so sympathetic, and you wrote me such a beautiful letter when Charles died. I am sure, too, that he would have been pleased with that lovely wreath! And—and I cannot forget the old days when we made toffee together in the schoolroom at home. Do you remember?"

Saville tried to look as though the toffee episode had for him thoughts too deep for utterance. He flung cautious glances about the scene and then hastily pressed her hand.

"How can you ask?" he said: "But believe me, dearest Lilian, our only duty is renunciation. I mean, we must forget our love, and if we can, each other. I have been waiting months to find words for all this: it seemed unutterable. Truth is difficult, and the less one speaks it the harder it grows. I have lied when I pretended to be happy. I find it easier after all to admit that I am in despair. Yet not despair—because I feel that honour is still dearer to me than your society. The thought is hackneyed, but so are the commandments. Some day you will meet some excellent, well-meaning man who will have a fortune worth offering you. Perhaps he will not be much to look at and he may not be polished in his manners. I daresay, too, that he will often say and do much which will jar on your refined taste. But polish is not everything!"

"I cannot live," cried Lady Mallinger, "in an unpolished atmosphere!"

"You see, my darling, we all have to endure disagreeable things in this life; money and love never seem to go together."

"We should have fifteen hundred a year," whimpered Lilian.

"What is that, my dear child?" said Saville. "Two thousand is the lowest income I can conceive myself marrying on. As I have said, if I cared for you in the ordinary, vulgar way, I might risk everything and urge you to ruin my whole life—and perhaps your own as well. So, darling, is it fair to tempt me?"

"I do not want to tempt you," said Lady Mallinger. "I only want to talk sensibly. Please, please, dear

Saville, do not say that I am tempting you. I would not be so wicked, for I am sure you only want to do right, and men know much more about honour and incomes and things like that than women do!"

Sweet, submissive, believing, unassertive Lilian, of a type all but extinct! Where would he find such another? He rose from his seat in agitation, feeling, for the moment, that he might in an emergency show the splendid indiscretion of a hero. But the mood passed, and with it a great deal of Lady Mallinger's folly. Something else, indefinable, chilling, deadly, took its place in her soul. She, too, stood up, and in silence they surveyed a far-distant and sleeping cow.

"You see, Lilian," Saville stammered at last.

"I see it all clearly," she replied. "I only wonder why I did not see it before. It would be the greatest mistake in the world for us to marry!"

This remark cut him to the heart: he flushed, his whole aspect suffered.

"No woman," he said, "could say such a thing to a man she loved. You cannot care for me."

"I do indeed care for you, Saville," she said, "please believe me."

Rookes, happily, did not need much persuasion to convince him. "This world is a beastly place," he burst forth. "It has everything to make one happy except happiness. Look at us! We are young, we love each other, we have the same tastes, and we are in the same set. How we could enjoy life! But we cannot afford it."

"It is hard," said Lilian, "terribly hard. I daresay, though, that it is all for the best."

"I must go away," said Saville: "I see too much of you; it is too tantalizing! But hush! here comes Felicia."

"How well you know her step!" exclaimed Lilian.

III.

Felicia Gorm was a young girl about seventeen, with large blue eyes, small regular features, and rosy cheeks; to-day she was even rosier than usual.

"Mama would be so grateful if you would talk to Mr. Van Huyster," she said to Saville; "he is asking so many questions about England, and no one can answer him."

When Rookes had left them, Felicia tried to look disinterested. "Have you ever noticed," she said, "how easily he blushes. . . . It does not mean anything—although Mama says that men only blush nowadays to be mistaken for Christians! I am sure that is not the case with Captain Rookes. . . . Do you like him?"

"We are half-cousins!"

The young girl sat down by her side. "Dear Lady Mallinger," she said, "I am dreadfully unhappy. But I am so fond of you; I am sure you will help me."

"Indeed, I will. What is troubling you?"

"Where shall I begin? Mama sent for me this morning. I felt it was to be a serious conversation because she wore her coronet brooch. She told me that if Mr. Wiche asked me to marry him, I was to say yes. Think of it! It seems they have arranged it all between them; they think he is growing too democratic, and now he has refused a Baronetcy he has

become more popular than ever. They say it would be such an excellent thing if he married a Peer's daughter, and Mama says I must sacrifice myself for the sake of the country. I am sure that marriage into *our* family will not change his opinion of the House of Lords! I have no influence with him, but Mama says I must try to have one; that he must be very fond of me or he would not stay here. Every one knows that he detests visiting as a rule. I believe he is in love with *you*, but Mama says that is an absurd idea, because he knew you before you married Lord Mallinger, and he is not the kind of man who would fancy your style of beauty in a wife. He is always staring at you, at any rate. Then I said he seemed great friends with Teresa; but then, as Mama says, dear Teresa is almost ugly, and if he had intended to marry her for her money, he would have done so long ago! So I suppose I must be the one after all, and in the end I shall have to accept him. But—but I shall always love Saville best!"

"Saville?" exclaimed Lady Mallinger, in astonishment. "Saville?"

"If you knew him as I do, you would not wonder that I love him," said Felicia, blushing deeply, "he is so chivalrous, so noble, so unselfish, just like King Arthur in Lord Tennyson. And to hear him speak of women! He thinks we are all angels. I am so afraid, dear Lady Mallinger, lest he may be disappointed in us, because we are not all angels, are we?"

Lady Mallinger all this time had kept her eyes on the ground, and, but for her gentle breathing, betrayed no signs of animation. At the girl's question, however, she stirred.

"Has Saville told you—has he said—has he spoken——?"

"He knows that I love him," said Felicia, faintly.

"But has he asked you to be his wife?"

"Not in so many words, but words are not everything. He is not rich; he is afraid people might say—you know what they always say. Once he told me he wished I had no money—that I was poor and unknown. Oh, I understand him so well."

"I am sure your family would not care for the match," said Lilian, at last; "and evidently they have set their hearts on Wiche. Wiche is rather odd, but I was only thinking last night what a fine face he has: he would make you a kind husband, and you would be quite contented—after a little." The foolishest of mortals may often be startled into a certain sagacity; and Felicia's innocence had the effect of rousing Lady Mallinger's common-sense which, though undisciplined and kitten-like, was still promising.

"No doubt," she continued, looking gravely at the girl's anxious face, "Saville is most agreeable, and it is very pleasing to think that such a handsome, popular fellow is in love with one. But would you feel so flattered if he were plain: if you heard, for instance, that he was fickle, mercenary, and treacherous!"

"But I might hear that of Wiche, too," said Felicia. "You see, dear Lady Mallinger, I must believe in *some* man or I could not marry at all! And I would rather be deceived by Saville than adored by Sidney Wiche!"

"That is absurd. I should be very wrong to encourage you in such ideas. When you are older you will see how foolish it is to indulge in these fancies!"

"I am afraid you do not like Saville," said Felicia, suddenly.

"My dear little girl," said Lilian, with great dignity, "it is only because I am Saville's friend that I understand your point of view!"

"Then why are you so angry with me for loving him? I am sure you would not care for any one who was not noble and generous—you would not be his friend if he did not have fine qualities!"

Conversation between a disillusioned devotee and an enthusiastic novice is always difficult: the disillusioned fears to be candid, and the enthusiast fears nothing; one has not learnt enough, the other has all to learn. This, then, was the situation of Lady Mallinger and Felicia. To one, Saville seemed a traitor; to the other, he was a being with neither body, soul, nor passions—a portable ideal who, at his sublimest, murmured, "I love you!" Rookes was, as a matter of fact, a mortal whose good intentions and generous admiration for the admirable were not steady enough to carry the load of a fashionable education, nor robust enough to endure the nipping cruelty of society small talk. He feared his better instincts as the pious do their besetting sins, and when he was surprised into one of his natural virtues, his first precaution was to make it appear a polite vice.

"I will not say one word against Saville," said Lady Mallinger, at last. "I would rather not discuss him. In any case I can only implore you to obey your relatives: after all they must know best."

"Then," said Felicia, "it would be useless to ask you to help me."

"What can I do?" asked Lady Mallinger; "what is there that I could do?"

"Well," said Felicia, "you see I am not yet engaged to Mr. Wiche. If he could only be made *not* to propose, everything would come right. Dear Lady Mallinger, if you would only distract his attention: you are so much prettier than I am, and I am sure he would be far more influenced by you than he ever could be by me. Oh, please promise me that you will try."

This suggestion was not without its charm. Lilian had a certain liking for Wiche: he appealed to her head rather than to her imagination, to her sympathies rather than to her senses: and, though he did not inspire her with poetic thoughts, he made the prose of her existence seem less like prose.

"Perhaps there would be no harm," she said, "and yet——"

"Oh, do promise," said Felicia, "my life and soul are bound up in it."

"One can tie a great many knots in one's life and soul," said Lady Mallinger.

"But love is so mysterious—so wonderful. It is the music of the world."

"It is a pity that it goes so often out of tune!" said Lilian. "Oh," she added suddenly, "our life is on so small a scale: everything seems so petty. Are women only born to fall in love with men like Saville Rookes? Why do we do these things?"

"Because there is nothing else for us to do, I suppose," said Felicia.

"But think of all these clever women who paint pictures, and make speeches, and write for the papers, and sing, and act, and play. Ah, how grand it must be to have something serious to think of!"

"I believe they get very tired of it," said Felicia. "I am sure they are not half so happy as we are."

"Are we happy?" said Lilian.

"Of course we are," replied the young girl. "What a strange question!"

"Perhaps it is strange. I feel tired."

"And you look pale," said Felicia. "Let me fetch you my scent-bottle." She ran lightly across the lawn and up the Terrace steps without perceiving Saville, who was returning from another direction.

He came close to Lady Mallinger and looked into her face.

"You do not look well," he said.

"I am well enough."

"Did that poor little thing bore you?"

"Not at all."

"Why are you so curt?"

"Am I?"

"Have I offended you?"

"Oh, no," said Lady Mallinger. "But you know quite well what Felicia has been talking about. You have acted abominably."

"What have I done?" asked Rookes. "Is it a crime to pay a few silly compliments to a child. She is hardly more. You are surely not jealous? You know you are the only woman I really care for. A man may love various women for various reasons at all times of his life, but he can only love once, one way. Each experience is totally different, and absolutely new; only one, however, can be quite satisfactory. Now to love you is my second nature; it is part of my constitution. If you do not trust me, why did you encourage me?"

"Why ?" said Lady Mallinger, with flashing eyes. "Why ? do you ask me why ? I will not lie to you. I loved you because I thought you loved me—because I felt that you would help me, *you*, who were so much stronger, so much nobler, so much braver than I. When you said . . . when you seemed to think I had some beauty, I longed to be the most beautiful of all women, that you might be proud of me : I longed to be royal that I might throw aside my royalty and show the world that I would rather be ruled by you than rule a kingdom : I wanted a palace that I might leave it and follow you into darkness and poverty : I wished that we lived in times of danger that I might save you from death, that I might lie for you, hate for you, steal for you, die for you ! How I have loved you ! how have you deceived me ! I have nothing left but contempt for both of us. . . . Stay there !"

She walked away alone, and as he felt too ashamed to follow in her footsteps, he chose another path, and was therefore late for luncheon. A fact which showed the injured woman that her words had played some havoc with his conscience.

IV.

Sir Ventry had been trying since noon to exchange a few words of immense importance with his sister. At last, in the drawing-room after luncheon, he found the moment. Teresa was playing the piano: Van Huyster and Felicia were within sight on the lawn. Lady Mallinger was cooing to some love-birds in a gilt cage which hung near the window. Lady Twacorbie sat at a little distance from the others, embroidering an altar-cloth. She was a being about five-and-thirty, dressed with elegance, but with no attempt at individuality. No doubt eleven out of every dozen women in her own station were wearing gowns of the same hue, make, and texture. Her hair was flaxen and arranged in the artificial, half-grotesque style commanded by Court hairdressers: at a first glance she looked like a wax doll—the unchanging expression, the neat, set features, the unseeing eyes, had not the divine impress. Yet she lived and was a woman: without her false curls, her whale-bones, and her stare, she was even beautiful: in unguarded moments, she was witty. She was not accomplished, however, and had no force of will; the winds of opinion blew her feather-like round the four corners of her boudoir. But in her way she was perfectly happy: she sighed for no new experiences and wept over no old ones: life presented no enigmas, and, feeling neither sorrow nor wonder, she had no need of philosophy. She read

nothing, but was extraordinarily observant, and had a most tenacious memory for little things. For instance, she could quote whole conversations, and describe to a half-turn just how this one entered a room, that one shook hands, and the other sat down : she delighted afternoon callers by remembering how each liked his or her tea—A. never took sugar, B. liked three large lumps or four small ones, C. only drank hot water, D. could not bear the sight of cream, and so on. This was the lighter side of her character : she had a certain amount of sentiment, and would have made a devoted wife and mother of the primitive type. But the creatures of her world were bored by devotion, so she flirted in the most religious manner possible, and had an Infants' Bible Class.

"My dear Charlotte," said Sir Ventry, "has it never occurred to you that Van Huyster is deeply interested in Felicia ? I have observed it for days."

"You are always making unnecessary discoveries," replied his sister. "You know my plans with regard to Felicia. Wiche will certainly speak to her either to-day or to-morrow."

Van Huyster is a far more desirable match ; he is not only richer, but more tractable," said Sir Ventry. "If he were to speak first——"

"As you say," murmured her ladyship, "he is enormously rich."

"Precisely : that is my point. And he goes everywhere."

"But then Wiche is such a power in politics," said Lady Twacorbie ; "think what good we could do by our influence over him !"

"The country would be far more grateful," said

Sir Ventry, "if we helped Van Huyster to spend his money in a gentlemanly manner. However, it is your affair not mine. I have made a suggestion: act on it or not, as you please," and he strutted magnificently from her presence.

For some moments Lady Twacorbie did not ply her needle, but unpicked the stitches she had taken during the preceding conversation. At last she called Lilian. "Come and talk to me, my dear," she said; "I have not had a word with you since breakfast. You see I drove Harold to the station"—(Lord Twacorbie had gone to town for a few days)—"He was so sorry to leave us." She glanced at Van Huyster and Felicia who passed the window. "We are so anxious about Felicia," she said; "young girls are so flighty—is it reasonable to suppose that they are competent to select the right sort of man? Ah, if women would only choose their husbands as carefully as they do their bonnets, how much brighter life would be!"

"But, my dear Lady Twacorbie, what would you call the right sort of a husband?"

"A man," she replied, "with means, position, a good digestion, and sound principles: such a person, for instance, as this excellent, kind-hearted, and deserving Van Huyster!"

"Van Huyster!" said Lady Mallinger, in surprise.

"Yes. Have you observed how extremely attentive he is to Felicia?"

"Perhaps I have, now you speak of it," said Lilian, "but I thought Mr. Wiche——"

"Ah!" said Lady Twacorbie, "Mr. Wiche is all very well in his proper place. I have the greatest

respect for his undeniable merits. I hope, however—I earnestly hope that he will not do anything rash. In fact, I may as well confess that I am in a difficulty. As Harold was obliged to go to town to-day, and as Ventry is not well, I asked Mr. Wiche if he would escort Felicia and myself to the Bishop's Bazaar this afternoon. I see now that it might cause gossip in the neighbourhood; people make such absurd remarks. Besides, I fear it is scarcely kind to throw the poor man so frequently in the dear child's society. Do you think you could keep him amused in some way until we have left the house: we can pretend that there was some blunder and perhaps take Mr. Van Huyster. . . . These things are difficult to explain."

"I think I understand," said Lady Mallinger: "of course, I will do anything to make myself useful. But I must at least change my gown: I heard him say he liked my blue muslin!" She went out laughing so gaily, that Teresa, who was playing mournful music, left the piano and came down to her cousin.

"What is the joke?" she asked.

Lady Twacorbie did not hesitate over her reply. She had made up her mind that Teresa was dying of love for the elegant Ventry and would therefore have no interest in the matrimonial schemes with regard to Sidney Wiche.

"Ventry has convinced me with regard to Van Huyster and Felicia," she said, at once. "Obstinacy is not one of my faults, and I am never deaf to reason. I have arranged everything in the most charming way: Lilian has agreed to distract Mr. Wiche's attention. Of course, dear, I would have asked you, but you are much too clever! One can only trust

a fool to carry out a plot of this kind with success. She is such a simpleton—just the silly creature to hoodwink a man of genius!"

"Oh, this is too much!" said Teresa. "I assure you a more accomplished actress never lived. She is far cleverer than either of us."

"Absurd! Impossible!" said Lady Twacorbie.

"There is nothing easier than the impossible—for Lady Mallinger. But I am sure that Sidney will see through her nonsense at once; you must remember that he is my friend and I have known him for years: your plan will not succeed."

"But he admires her extremely," said Lady Twacorbie.

"Has he ever told you so?"

"Of course not: it is because he has never said so, that I am certain of it. Men are dreadfully discreet, my dear Teresa. I only believe in what they do *not* say. But come, we must leave the coast clear, come!"

Teresa followed her slowly.

V.

Lady Mallinger re-entered the room a few moments later, in all her bravery of blue muslin, ribbons, and lace. She was cooing to the love-birds when Wiche came in. His acquaintance with Lady Mallinger had extended over some four years: from her point of view it might have been called a dinner-party friendship—that is to say, they could discuss people and subjects of the hour with a freedom which passes well enough for intimacy in the vagueness, bustle, and gigantic pettiness of a London season. But to Wiche their occasional meetings and interchange of ideas had meant much more; the man of letters is not a man of letters if he accepts life and the circumstances of life as they appear at first sight—it is the prime instinct of his nature to reject what *seems* and to clutch—or die in failing to clutch—things not as they are, but as his imagination would have them. To be brief, our friend had fallen in love with the idea of loving Lady Mallinger.

"Do I disturb you?" he said, and took a seat near her. She smiled at him and made a charming grimace at her pets.

"There is a bazaar at the Bishop's this afternoon," he continued, "and I believe I was expected to go, but as Van Huyster enjoys these things and I do not, I have asked Lady Twacorbie to take him in my

stead. I hope she will not be offended, but I really wanted to get a quiet hour with you.

Her heart jumped and she studied him with a new interest. There is one glory of the friend, and another glory of the possible lover. For the first time she discovered that he had a certain intensity, a masterful air, a look of determination—all of which she admired.

"We have so few opportunities to speak to each other," he said.

"You have changed since I first knew you," cried Lady Mallinger: "we were such good friends once, and now—when we meet—I hardly know how to describe it—there is a coldness, a restraint. I have feared that you did not like me. But I am saying too much."

"If I told you that there was indeed a reason for my restraint, would you care?"

She put her lips to the cage and piped, apparently to the birds—"Tell me the reason!"

"Have you never guessed it? was I so hard to understand?"

"I could never understand any man, but then a man never seems able to explain himself, does he?"

"It may be that he dare not try," said Wiche.

"What could he fear?" she asked; "can it be that men know how unstable they are? I always thought they could not, because they never try to be firmer. And I love firmness! Now we women know only too well that we are very weak, very foolish, very shallow, and we wonder what men can see in us! We must be so tiresome! such burdens! such unnecessary evils! such tedious, provoking creatures! Some of us may have some beauty; yet that

soon goes, and then there is nothing left of us but a headache! Oh, do not look surprised: I fear I am growing cynical. I am beginning to agree with many of your views on the soul, and death, and marriage, and things of that order!"

"Ah! never trust a man's opinion on any subject until he has been in love," said Wiche. "Love is the only thing which can make life as clear as noon-day."

"Then I suppose you still find it dark and perplexing! Dear me! how idly I talk. I meant to say—but would it be impertinent? I was only thinking that a day, an hour, perhaps a few words might make all the difference in your ideas!"

"If I told you," said Wiche, "that sleeping and waking I heard but one voice, saw but one face."

"Does it bore you?" she said, "would you rather *not* see it?"

"Each day," he continued, "it grows dearer to me, more beautiful, more—ah! if I waited until I were more eloquent I would never speak, never tell you my one hope, my one aim, my one ambition—above all things, beyond all things, before all things. Just—to gain you; to gain you—just that. I would not own it was impossible, I only saw you, loved you and waited. You passed me by, you hardly knew me. I was only one in a crowded world. A friend? Yes, when you remembered me? was that often? Sometimes we talked together: once I wrapped you in your opera cloak, have you forgotten? I touched your cheek—it was an accident."

"As you say," murmured Lilian, "it only happened once."

"Another time you leant for a moment on my arm."

"That was a year ago!"

"In March," he said, "it was a perfect night."

"Oh, no! it rained."

"A perfect night," he repeated, moving nearer, "and you never guessed how much I loved you: how much you were to me; how much I loved you! How beautiful, how very beautiful——" He kissed her.

Lady Mallinger started away in a sudden panic. "I did not mean to say so much," she said. "I did not mean—but hark!" She put her finger to her lips and flew across the room into a large chair with wide arms. These concealed her from Teresa Warcop who now entered. She was evidently much agitated in spite of her quiet manner. "I am so glad to find you alone," she said to Wiche, "because I must speak to you. But first let me say, in justice to myself, that I am not a mischief-maker. If I ever seem meddlesome it is only because I am so interested in my friends that I cannot remain silent when speech would be of service to them."

"You have too much heart," said Wiche.

"I cannot bear to see a man deceived, trifled with, made a jest for chattering vixens!" said Teresa, passionately.

"The worst of it is that he rarely shows gratitude if one endeavours to enlighten him."

"A thankless task, I know," said Teresa; "but if we only do our duty for the sake of being thanked, we are miserable creatures. . . . O Sidney! never trust a woman! At least, never trust blue eyes! Oh! when I think of it, I lose all patience, almost all charity. That such a man should be duped by such a woman!

Woman, did I say? No, a mere bundle of fire and frivolity!"

"How much more promising than mere flesh-and-blood," exclaimed Wiche.

"She made a bargain," said Teresa, "a kind of wager—that she would force you into a flirtation. And she thinks she is succeeding: she even began her machinations at luncheon. I saw it all: her looks, laughs, sighs. Oh, it was insupportable!"

"Are you speaking of poor little Felicia?" said Wiche.

"Felicia?" said Teresa. "Felicia? When I speak of a creature with neither heart, morals, mind, nor beauty—a heap of lies, vanity, and affectation—I mean Lady Mallinger."

Wiche grew so pale that Teresa—half with jealousy and half with fright—grew even paler. She held out both her trembling hands, and stumbled blindly towards him.

"My heart has been with you," she stammered. "I feel it all, see it all, know it all."

What she meant she hardly knew. He neither looked nor uttered a reply; but, brushing past her with a gesture hard to translate, walked to the window. A stillness almost like some grim and living presence filled the room. Teresa remained in her rigid attitude, staring, with despairing tenderness, not at the man, but at the place where he had stood.

"A wager! a bargain!" said Wiche, at last. "I do not understand."

"Nor did I when I first heard it," said Teresa. "I could scarcely believe anything so odious, even of her. And I have heard a good many stories, too!

But Charlotte explained the matter only too clearly. *Lilian was to distract you.* That was the expression: her own words." She paused a moment. Wiche never stirred, but kept one unchanging expression, which betrayed nothing save its unchangeableness. "Have I been wrong to tell you?" she went on; "have I been wrong? But friendship, my sense of justice, and you—the noblest man I know, the one above all others I—I respect."

"I do not understand you—or her," said Wiche, at last.

"My dear friend, men only understand the kind of woman who is more masculine than a man! . . . But, Sidney, are you vexed with me? Have I been too zealous? You know, you surely believe I meant no malice? Yet I cannot say that I feel any kindness for Lady Mallinger; that would be impossible. I despise her!"

"Is that necessary?" said Wiche.

"Can I forgive her conduct towards yourself? Not that she has succeeded in fooling you. But the attempt—I cannot forgive the attempt. What impudence! what presumption!"

"Ah, there you are unjust! The feat was well within her power: I was only too willing to be fooled."

"Willing!" cried Teresa. "Where is your spirit? How weak a man is, after all! What a mercy that she cannot hear you: it would make her even vainer than she is by nature."

"I fear we are growing too old and prosaic," said Wiche, bitterly; "no wonder these young people try to rouse us."

"Sidney! . . . Do I seem old?"

"No one would guess your age," he said, without looking at her.

"Unfortunately, you know it!" said Teresa. "Would you have forgiven *me*, if I had made such a bargain as this other woman? I think not."

Wiche did not hear the remark, or if he did, he made no reply.

She swallowed a sob and left the room.

VI.

Lady Mallinger came forward half-crying, half-defiant.

"I cannot, I will not believe one word Teresa has said!" exclaimed Wiche. "She is the most honest soul in the world, but she makes mistakes."

"You would be wiser," said Lilian, slowly, "if you believed her."

"So you admit it," he said. "Do you think that Love is a plaything? a mood for a dull afternoon? a frame of mind to jump in and out of just for amusement? Is it nothing to stake your life on another's, to be faithful when they are faithless, strong when they are weak? Is it so little to love like this? Do you think it is so easy? Do you think it brings much happiness?"

Until that hour, the devotion he had felt for Lady Mallinger was of that unreal kind which is only dangerous so long as its object remains an idea. It was to a great extent theoretic, and based on the dogmas of erotic poetry: in her image he loved a dozen heroines—not one woman. Now that he had kissed her, however, and she had shown herself sufficiently human to rouse his anger, the whole relation changed. He no longer saw her through the mist of sentimental fancy; she was simply a pretty woman who attracted him. He felt vaguely that she might tempt him to say and do much

which he would surely repent of. He repeated again, "Do you think such love brings much happiness?"

"Ah! if you only knew me as I know myself," murmured Lady Mallinger. "All that Teresa said of me was true—and yet, not true enough. Everything about me was falsehood and pretence, until—until you seemed to believe in me. Do you understand? Can you not see? Are you so unforgiving, or—are you only blind? Why are you so silent?"

She held out her hand, which he took half-eagerly and half in dread: her lightest touch seemed so much more satisfying than all the wisdom of the ancients.

"If I could only remain silent," said Wiche, passionately; "if I could only keep you—only feel that you were mine—mine—mine at all risks! Yet no—you act too well. I could never know how much I was mistaken."

"Why should we refuse the happiness this hour gives us, because some other hour might take it away? In the meantime, there can be no better thing than this. No one before has ever cared whether I was in jest or earnest," she faltered; "every other man takes it for granted that I am heartless, brainless, and soulless in any case. When I am serious, they say I am in low spirits; when I am sincere, they praise my hypocrisy. So I take refuge in deceit, and I succeed so well that now I have deceived myself, and I no longer know what I mean, what I want, what I think, or what I am! To judge me fairly, you should have lived my life. My father was not kind; at eighteen I married. The world liked my husband: he ate too much, drank too much, and made too

merry with other people's lives. No one knows what I have suffered. I have only found one thing which outweighs disappointment—bitterness—all—all that is harsh, heavy to bear, and terrible. That moment—that one moment when you trusted me. . . . It was so unexpected. I had always liked you as a friend; but you seemed so far away, and I thought you could only have contempt for me and my vain, hopeless life. And the end of it all? Do you suppose I never think of that? Every night I say to myself, 'Another day has gone; another day of false hopes, false friends, false loves, false hates, false griefs!' Think of it! Not even a real grief: my life, myself, all—all a sham!"

"Help me to be as honest as you are," said Wiche: "is there no eternity before us? the longest past is but a second in comparison. See!" he said, kissing her, "we have forgotten it already!"

Men may still find oblivion in a kiss, but women of fashion are always—or nearly always—too self-conscious to forget the artificialities of life in the verities of passion.

"Forgotten already?" repeated Lady Mallinger, moving away from him, "I wish it were. Do not be angry with me, but I must be alone a little. There are so many things to think about—so many things. Give me half an hour."

"So much?" said her lover.

"Have we not eternity before us?" she replied.

Wiche laughed, kissed both her hands, and went out on to the Terrace: he found it almost as delightful to obey her whims as to worship her beauty. Only the strong-minded can know the extreme pleasure

of self-surrender. Wiche's life had been so hard, so serious, and, in a sense, so wise until this too-enchanting present, that he seized its madness rather as a reward from the gods than a curse. He put all thought of the future from his mind—not because he feared it, but because it possessed no attraction for him. Lady Mallinger was an inexhaustible delight: egoism, which in any other woman seemed intolerable, was, in her case, the most charming thing in the world: selfishness, he argued, where the self was so perfectly bewitching even amounted to a duty: dull, tedious, and unpleasant beings did well to lose sight of themselves, but for Lilian to forget herself would be like a flower forgetting to bloom.

When Wiche had gone Lilian paced the floor and mistook this bodily exercise for deep thought. She was brought to a standstill by finding herself face to face with Teresa, who, not being able to quiet her soul, had returned in the hope of seeing Wiche once more.

"You look depressed," she said to Lady Mallinger: "at luncheon you were all vivacity, epigram, and paradox. If you had not told me I should never have suspected that you considered it your vocation to play the fool!"

"Ah, I am much wiser since our conversation this morning," said Lady Mallinger, "I am sure that the supreme happiness of a woman's life is to devote herself to the man who loves her: to be his friend, his ideal, his good angel!"

Teresa smiled bitterly. "And the supreme difficulty of a woman's life," she said, "is to find the man who desires such devotion, who *has* an ideal, who

wants a good angel! The best of men only ask us to be for ever young and for ever pretty: let your conscience go to the dogs but keep your freshness. Virtue never yet atoned for wrinkles!"

"There I cannot agree with you," said Lady Mallinger. "I am sure that there is nothing so fascinating as sincerity! It is so uncommon. I am going to be the most sincere woman in the world, and I must begin by telling you that I was present just now during your conversation with Mr. Wiche."

"What conversation?" said Teresa.

"Let us both be sincere, dear Miss Warcop! I was sitting in that green chair when you mentioned my name. My first impulse was to rush forward: curiosity, however, intervened and I remained in my corner. Perhaps this was wrong, but my position was difficult: to begin with, I agreed perfectly with every word you said: you were only too charitable. I assured Mr. Wiche of this afterwards, but he would not believe me. When I told him that I had indeed neither mind, morals, heart, nor beauty, he looked so incredulous, and was so deaf to all argument that I despair of convincing him! Men are so prejudiced. What would you advise me to do?"

"This sarcasm does not cut!"

"Sarcasm!" cried Lilian, "I was never more candid, more natural, more absolutely transparent in my life. Why should I dissemble when I have found that you know me even better than I know myself?"

"This innocent air may deceive some infatuated man—for a time," said Teresa, "but I understand it too well. How can you dare to look so amiable when you know that you hate me. . . . You *must* hate me."

"Not at all: I think you are indiscreet and perhaps too impulsive, but, on the whole, I admire your character: it has a stability, a doggedness, a courage which mine lacks. I would never have the audacity, for instance, to discuss your faults with Sir Ventry. He would, I hope, be quite as blind with regard to you as my future husband is where I am concerned."

"Your future husband?" said Teresa.

"Yes," said Lady Mallinger. "Sidney was foolish enough to ask me to be his wife—at least, in so many words—and I was wise enough to accept him! If he will only trust me and believe in me always—if he will only see me—not as I am, but as I should be—I am sure we shall be happy!"

"It is not hard to be good when you have love and sympathy and encouragement," said Teresa, warmly, "but to be good when not one soul cares whether you live or die, when your kindest thoughts, your least selfish acts, your dearest sacrifices are treated alike with insult, cruelty, and contempt—to be good then, that is the great achievement. Stand alone, be indifferent to smiles and frowns, keep your eyes steadily fixed on one unattainable ideal and condemn in yourself all that falls short of it, do that and I will call you happy! Defy slander, defy the malice of evil tongues and false hearts, defy even one rule of etiquette!"

"No woman has anything to fear except the truth," said Lady Mallinger, "so long as the truth will bear telling, she can laugh at lies. They may for a time work mischief, but only for a time."

"I, too, could have such a faith in the triumph of virtue if I had such a lover as Sidney!" said Teresa,

"but live my life for a month and then tell me your philosophy!"

"You look cold," murmured Lilian, after a shiver and a slight pause.

"Cold! I am always cold: feel my hand."

Lady Mallinger held it to her own pink cheeks. "You make me like you," she said; "as a rule I do not care for women, and you are almost as spiteful as the rest. But there is something about you. . . . You believe me, when I say I like you?"

"Yet you have robbed me of my one friend," cried Teresa, "you—you who have so much already. You are young and he thinks you are beautiful: I shall soon be old and I was always plain: many men have loved my money, but no one has ever loved *me*. In the Convent—I was brought up in a Convent—the sisters taught me how to live in Heaven: they forgot I had to get through the world first. My parents are dead and now I have nothing in this life except my wretched, hopeless interest in a man who has never given me a thought. Perhaps I need not say that. He is the only man I know who has not asked me to marry him, so I think he must like me a little. And he comes to see me very often. But you only care for him because he flatters you, you are proud of him because he is distinguished, but I was proud of him when he was poor and obscure, when every one thought him an outcast, when it was almost a crime in our miserable little corner of society to be seen even bowing to him. You do not understand him as I do: you cannot help him as I could: you play on all his weaknesses: every hour he spends with you will be a step backwards. Oh! he is no hero in my eyes, no

passionless, faultless machine, but a Man. . . . Go! tell him all I have said, laugh at me, pity me, say 'Poor woman! That so plain and dull a creature should fall in love. How pathetic! how ridiculous!'"

Before Lilian could reply, Teresa rushed out of the room. Lady Mallinger rubbed her eyes: she, too, had once loved like this and she had been deceived. The mere remembrance of Saville drove all other thoughts from her mind: she forgot Wiche, she forgot Teresa, she forgot everything—the universe contained but two beings—herself and Rookes. Fate brought him to her at that critical moment.

"I have been for a stroll with Sir Ventry," he began awkwardly. "I—I am wretched. Are you still angry?"

"I do not think we can have anything to say to each other, Saville," she said; "the last words were spoken this morning. I could wish they had been kinder: I should like to remember that we parted, at least as friends. We were so much to each other once—once we thought it could never come to this. . . . Please leave me."

"No, I have been longing for a chance to speak to you; now I have found it, you must listen. I will not attempt to defend myself—I——"

"You cannot: how could you? You might perhaps say that you became desperate about your debts, and so—in a sort of madness—thought to marry Felicia for her money. You might say—ah, a thousand things, but they could make no difference. It is too late to think of them."

"Too late?" said Rookes. "How can it be too late when you are there and I am here." He knelt

down by her side and, custom proving too strong for him, kissed her cheek. Custom was, perhaps, too strong for her also : at all events, she made no resistance. "You know my faults," he went on, "you could never have loved me for my perfection."

"I loved the man you might have been," she murmured, "not you at all." She glanced down and found her hand lying in his. "Not you at all," she repeated. "Besides . . . it really is too late. I—I have lost the right to listen to you."

VII.

In the meantime Wiche's half-hour had come to an end. The clock was chiming five when he appeared at the drawing-room window. Rookes sprang to his feet: Lady Mallinger affected to laugh.

"My cousin is teasing me," she said; "he will not let me tell him that I am really a very serious woman. He—he does not believe in me as you do!" As she spoke she touched Wiche's arm as though to assert her ownership. Neither of the men spoke: a footman entered and announced that tea was served on the lawn.

"We must go then," said Lilian. She led the way, but when she turned, she found that only Wiche had followed her.

"It is as well," she said, in her prettiest manner; "we are happier by ourselves!" This was no doubt charming, and it may have been true. Wiche, however, was no less troubled by the fact than the possibility. Both were distracting, for, at that moment, he wished to overlook her fascination and think only of what was certain. And the one thing certain was, in his judgment, her love for Rookes. This truth—like all truths—had flashed upon him like a message from his guardian angel.

"Do not look so grave," said Lady Mallinger; "we have been serious the whole afternoon, and now I want to rest! Do you like me in pink? Because

I have the loveliest pink satin which I am dying to wear this evening."

"How old are you?" he said, suddenly.

"Oh! My dear, dear Sidney! One can see that you have never made love before! How old am I? I forget: I was born so long ago. I must be at least twenty-two. Of course, I look even more, but then my life has been so unhappy. Now it will all be different, and perhaps I shall grow young again. You will be kind to me, will you not? And patient? And you will not expect to find me very good, and very truthful, and very quiet all at once. You will give me time? And you will not often be as cross as you are now, will you?" At length she saw it was useless to ignore the demon who sat between them. "It was not my fault," she said, "it really was not my fault. I told Saville I had lost the right to listen to him. And now you are blaming me. It is so hard that I must always be made miserable—even when I have made up my mind to be contented. I have tried my very best," she added, "to be happy this afternoon!"

"Was it such an effort?" said Wiche.

"All—all is an effort," she answered, "except folly. That seems the only easy, natural, and pleasant thing in the world!"

"What do you call folly?"

"Everything I want to do, everything I want to say, everything I care for—that is what I call folly."

"My dear," said Wiche, "you are in love. And Rookes is the man!"

"Tut! How little you know me! I admit that I am greatly attached to Saville—in spite of his faults,

but then I have known him so long! But in love with him—never! We are the dearest friends possible, and quarrel incessantly—but that is all!"

"Are you sure?" said Wiche, "are you sure that is all?"

She made no answer, but, soothing her lace which fluttered a little in the breeze, hummed without knowing it,

> "Virtue how frail it is!
> Friendship how rare!
> Love, how it sells poor bliss
> For proud despair!"

"That," said Wiche, gravely, "is what Rookes was singing last evening."

"Pity me," she murmured.

"Why?"

"I adore him!"

While we exist we can never escape any stage of development; if our infancy be prematurely wise, our years of discretion will have an inappropriate childishness. Lilian was living life backwards, and her sudden moods of immaturity which may have accounted for Rookes's corresponding moods of fickleness, filled Wiche with dismay. Passion in these circumstances was impossible: affection became angelic, and sentiment lost all question of sex.

"I adore Saville," she repeated, and looked at Wiche with so beseeching an air, with such utter helplessness and irresponsibility that he wondered how he could ever have mistaken her for a woman. He still recognized her grace and beauty, but it roused in him the

same kind of emotion a man might feel on seeing the child of one he had loved deeply and who was dead. It was a sorrowful task to trace the resemblance: to note the likeness in line, and delicate tones and expression: to say to himself, "Lilian's mouth had that curve, her eyes were that colour, her throat was as white!"

"You must forget," he said, "you must forget—if you have not already forgotten—all that passed this afternoon. It was a great mistake."

It was a great mistake. Lady Mallinger brushed the echo of these words from her ear: she would not believe that they had ever been uttered. "This is what comes," she thought, "of telling a man the truth: he flies!"

"You may have made a mistake," she replied, "but I have said nothing to you which I could ever wish to unsay. Saville told me this morning that men may fall in love dozens of times, but that each experience is new. They can only love once one way. This is true of women also. And it all comes to this: love is precisely the same kind of emotion as religion. Oh, if we would only be as patient with human nature as God is! Some days we are more devout than others: the saint who appeals to you in one mood may repel you in another: this month we devote ourselves to Our Lady, and another to St. Paul; some people, too, mistake incense for dogma, and love of music for love of virtue. But the folly and sensuousness of creatures like myself cannot touch the great unalterable truths. I may never know them as they are, but they have been known. You will wonder what I am trying to tell you. It is hard to say: I

believe I mean that my adoration of Saville is not very serious!"

Wiche was a man who had learnt what he knew of human nature through self-discipline and not through self-abandon. Knowing therefore his own character and its possibilities so well, he was astonished to find that Lilian's was so like—subject, of course, to certain feminine modifications. He was acquainted with many men who could give an accurate appraisement of each and all their impulses, thoughts, and emotions, who were such skilled self-analysts that they never by any chance confounded their soul with their body, or their conscience with either. He had never met a woman, however, who possessed this power even in a slight and half-unconscious degree; he looked at Lilian and felt that while she had cured him of his fit of love, she had never seemed so deeply interesting as a fellow-creature.

"My dear," he said, "you must surely see that we should be wretched if we married."

"Why?" said Lilian, "it would be such a comfort to me to have some one I could really trust and believe in; some one who would help me to be serious; to know one being at least who was not led away by all manner of idle fancies!"

The irony of the situation would have been ludicrous if it had not been so heart-breaking.

"Do not imagine that I am that one being," said Wiche, hastily. "God knows I am flimsy enough. And I am afraid it is always disastrous to pin one's faith to a mere mortal. Even the best of us are miserably imperfect as rocks of defence; you see we are flesh-and-blood, we are not granite."

"Treat me as though I had a mind, Sidney," she said, "and I will follow you to the ends of the earth!"

"I do not think," he stammered, "we could ever be happy together."

"You mean," said Lady Mallinger, "that you do not care for me in the way you thought."

"I will always be your friend," he said, firmly, "but——" Her sense of what was just and meet told her that it only remained now to call her soul into her eyes, gaze mournfully at Wiche, and leave him. Saville after all loved her the best.

Women like Lady Mallinger have to die young in order to be understood: then—and then not always—some onlooker more discerning than the others will see in the cold body some trace of a fiery spirit too ardent and too restless for mortality. Alas! poor soul. Seeking the highest, best, most beautiful, and purest—and finding a Saville Rookes.

The modern is always an unwilling slave to sentiment: if he find himself captivated by a romantic love or a sublime ideal he accepts his state in the shamefaced and hopeless certainty that his common-sense will one day come to the rescue. He cannot believe that what he takes for beauty will always be so fair, or that what seems good for the moment could be inspiring for ever. Satisfaction only makes him restless: he sighs for happiness and, having found it, sighs lest, after all, it should only be a shadow cast by his own desires. Wiche therefore suffered his disappointment with smiling patience and with something even of relief; once he had doubted that all was vanity, had suspected that life yet held much that was precious

and desirable, that love was an immortal fact, and endured. He felt now that he need struggle no longer against despair, and, abandoning himself to the intense pleasures of profound melancholy, became agreeably tired of existence. To his unspeakable resentment, however, one shining thought pierced the blackness of his thoughts. Teresa still remained. But she had never been his ideal. Teresa was Teresa—a vivid, distinct personality, a being whom no amount of romantic disguise could make seem other than she was, and who was incomparable, not because of her singular merits, but because no one else had the same faults.

VIII.

Sir Ventry Coxe had been educated in the belief that his cousin Teresa loved him madly. When he married Lady Susan Hoppe-Gardner, a chorus went up from all the members of his family. "What on earth will poor Teresa do?" She was present at the wedding, nevertheless, and seemed in the best possible spirits: the relations looked wise and murmured that it was impossible for the unhappy girl to deceive *them.* Ventry was particularly kind to her; he clasped her hand warmly when he started on his honeymoon and thanked her again and again with tears in his eyes, for her magnificent gift in the shape of a diamond necklace for his bride: every one said it was too touching for words, several ladies declared that Teresa grew as white as a sheet and would have swooned if Lord Twacorbie, with his ready tact, had not led her to the air.

A few years passed: Miss Warcop refused all offers; Lady Susan died. This, all the relations said, was Fate. Sir Ventry, remembering Teresa's rent-roll, thought so too. He decided to make her his wife when a decent period of mourning had elapsed; there was no hurry, she was there, ready, waiting, and willing, when he wanted her.

The day at last dawned when it seemed convenient to address her on the subject: he met her in the hall as she left the drawing-room after her scene with

Lady Mallinger. She was greatly embarrassed, a fact which he easily attributed to her sudden encounter with himself. Smiling magnanimously, he waited until she had regained her composure.

"Shall we go into the garden?" he suggested.

No, she was feeling rather tired; she had a slight headache; he would find her a very dull companion.

"*Do* come," he said, in his most persuasive manner.

Teresa, who was always amused at his conceit, and who had a motherly, pitying affection for the weaknesses which did duty for his character, yielded the point and followed him. He began to talk of former days: he reminded her of his five-and-twentieth birthday, when she gave him a hunter and wore a black cloak lined with scarlet.

"You look awfully well in scarlet," he observed. She blushed: scarlet was Wiche's favourite colour. Sir Ventry, however, took the blush to himself.

"I always admired you, you know," he said; "there is not a woman in the family who has got such a complexion, and your eyelashes are so long!"

"It is very nice of you to say so," said Teresa: "I, myself, do not think they are bad. Once or twice I have thought I looked quite decent!"

He glanced at her sideways. Was she really so plain as all the women made out?

"I am awfully fond of you," he said suddenly.

Teresa was by no means dense. "My dear Ventry," she said, with rather a nipping air, "let us talk like reasonable beings."

"I am quite serious," he replied. "Will you marry me, Teresa?"

"Certainly not. You must be mad."

"What?"

"You must be mad. And think yourself very lucky that I forgive you for making such an insulting suggestion." Trembling with anger she left him. He looked up to see whether the Heavens were falling.

IX.

Teresa sat alone in the drawing-room before dinner that evening. The lamps were lit and their hazy light fell on the orange velvet draperies, the vases of blue Sevres, the Chinese embroideries on scarlet satin, the copper bowls, the tiger skins and the Indian shawls. Teresa loved colour, gorgeous sunsets, the blare of trumpets, loud music—all that could send some note of the tremendous into the undramatic tragedy of her existence. To-night she wore a gown of silver brocade : lace concealed her neck, and long sleeves her arms, but neither brocade nor lace could hide the slight, almost angular figure of their wearer. She held a book of devotions in her lap, the leaves of which she turned at random, but her glance fell now on the clock, and now on the mirror—rarely on the volume and its grotesque old woodcuts of saints and ecstatic virgins. At last the sound of footsteps in the corridor without, and the opening of a door, marred the disquieting repose of her vigil. She let fall the book of prayers ; the little crash it made on striking the floor and the rustle of her silk petticoat drowned the words of greeting which she addressed to Wiche, who now entered.

He chose a chair near hers, but she, half-unconsciously, shrank back. He was too engrossed in his own thoughts, however, to notice the movement.

"I fear I seemed most ungrateful this afternoon,"

he said, "but I felt quite sure that you would one day understand Lady Mallinger, and know, as I do, the real woman. Perhaps I should say the real child."

"When I spoke," said Teresa, in a low voice, "I did not know that you loved her. And she has charmed away my prejudice since then. I will frankly admit that I did not wish to discover anythink bewitching either in her face or in her manner. I only wanted to have the right to detest her with a clear conscience!"

"Yet, in spite of all this, she conquered you?"

"She conquered me," repeated Teresa, "but let me say one thing—she is too romantic: she lives by moonlight."

Wiche laughed. "She has seen a great deal of the world," he said, "and I have often been struck by her extraordinary, almost terrible common-sense. She may have a certain amount of sentimentalism in her brain, but at heart she is cold and critical. This ache to be amused, this longing to hear music in the air, to see beauty on all sides, to find life one ever-new, yet ever-abiding pleasure, these are the fierce, never-gratified desires of those who love only themselves. But to him who loves others—even one other"—he found himself looking into Teresa's eyes—"even one other—the commonest things seem rare, the blackest shadows have a radiance indescribable, and the harshest notes are heavenly melodies: disappointment, bitterness, and desolation have no part in his existence!"

"These exalted moods are brief—terribly brief," said Teresa, "and they show us just enough of our lost divinity to make us ever more wretched as mere

mortals and children of Adam. It is the day after, the days after, the weeks, months, years after when we can only remember that once we were happy for half-an-hour!" She seemed to have forgotten Wiche's presence, and he felt that she was thinking of something in her own experience in which he bore no part. It was certain that she could have no knowledge of his love-adventure with Lady Mallinger, and he could not make up his mind to tell the news just then.

"I wonder," he said, abruptly, "I have often wondered why you are the only one in the world I can talk to without the dread of saying either more or less than I mean."

"I will tell you why," she answered: "I could never misunderstand you, Sidney, because I love you." Although she was a woman in whom the coquette was, at all events, slumbering, her primmest, least emotional manner had the mysterious charm of those things which we note unmoved and remember with passionate interest. She made her declaration of love so quietly that Wiche saw neither its oddness, nor, indeed, its full meaning: he coloured a little, however, at the sense her words might have conveyed.

"Do not think I am choosing phrases at random," she went on, "I meant what I said. There is only one thing in my life which I can be grateful for—that is my love for yourself. Many people would think it very unwomanly on my part to tell you this: I am only proud to know that I am capable of loving any one. All affection seems to have been laughed out of the world: when it is not ridiculous, it is thought hysterical. To me it remains and always

must remain, the greatest—the only perfect gift—that God has given us. So I have told you." Her lips trembled a little as she added, "I suppose, too, you have heard it already from Lady Mallinger?"

"What could I hear from Lady Mallinger," he asked, growing more and more bewildered. Teresa's expression was so frigid though her words were so kind. "I am sure we are talking at cross purposes."

"Do you mean to say," she stammered, "that she never told you all—all I said to her this afternoon?"

"She has never uttered your name."

Teresa hid her face in her hands and forced back her tears. She had needlessly betrayed her secret.

"I will explain," she said, at last. "Lady Mallinger told me this afternoon that she was going to marry you: we had some words and I—I confessed quite plainly what I—I said just now. And I thought she would surely repeat it—so—in order to avoid any misapprehension—I decided to let you hear it from me also. It needed courage, but now all my courage has gone—I had only enough for that. It wanted so much. Do not say a word: please go."

"Lady Mallinger is not going to marry me," he said, quietly.

He touched Teresa's hand, and conquered his impulse to kiss it: that was not the moment, nor indeed could he imagine a time when it might be the moment. She seemed to stand in an enchanted circle. Suddenly, he saw that she was crying. This touch of weakness seemed to supply the one thing he had always missed in her character. Teresa had, as a rule, a self-command which was almost forbidding—even her occasional indis-

cretions had something well-considered and reasonable. She lacked that inconsequence, that capriciousness, that delicious nonsense which most men and all strong natures find so alluring and adorable. To see her weeping, therefore, was to behold a new creature. Wiche was uncertain how to reply, when she herself, brushing the tears from her cheeks, asked him a question.

"Why?" she said, "why are you not going to marry Lady Mallinger?"

"I want to tell you about that," he said. "I am afraid there is not time to tell the whole story now. But Lady Mallinger discovered that she had made a mistake, she loved some one else, and I—I have been such a fool, Teresa, such a fool! I do not know whether I love you or not. I only know that I hate my life when you are not near me!" This truth, which had been sleeping so long, woke at the first whisper of its name: he realized how pitiably little would remain to him if Teresa were taken from his memory: it was her very oneness with his own mind which had made him overlook her: when he imagined that he was thinking of himself he was thinking of Teresa also.

"I only know," he said once more, "that I hate my life when you are not near me!"

She could have wished that he had expressed himself with less egoism; if he cared for her at all it was because she was necessary to his peace of soul: at least, so it sounded. But she was a woman who found her happiness in giving and loving: she made no demands; she looked neither for gratitude, nor homage, nor appreciation; she only asked the right

to give and to love. So she gave Wiche her hand; her heart had been his from the beginning.

"Without you," she said, "I have no life to hate!"

This may have been weak, but Teresa was not strong-minded. And perhaps it is as well for those of us who are proud and self-reliant that just such simple, undignified, and affectionate creatures are to be found here and there. They may speak for us on Judgment Day, which will be the longest, darkest, and coldest, this world has seen.

X.

WHICH CONTAINS A LETTER WRITTEN THE SAME EVENING BY LADY TWACORBIE TO HER HUSBAND.

"ARDEN LODGE,
"NEAR WENSLEY,
"MERTFORD.

"MY DEAR HAROLD,—I am so annoyed and disgusted that I can scarcely hold my pen. Wiche has proposed to *Teresa*, and has been accepted. What could be more outrageous than such conduct? As for Teresa, you know I always thought her dreadfully sly. How any woman could prefer Wiche to Ventry! But there, what on earth does Wiche see in Teresa? Van Huyster told me in the course of conversation at dinner that he is engaged to some American person in Paris, and that he hopes to persuade her to marry him on the *Fourth of July*. We must really be more careful in future about whom we invite to the house. Lilian and Rookes are flirting in the most unexpected manner. I thought they could not *bear* each other. *Nothing*, however, would astonish me in that direction after the surprises of this day. I believe that I am the only sane person in the house. Thank goodness, they all go to-morrow. I long for rest. Felicia seems hysterical; I never knew a girl of seventeen

with so many nerves. She must go on with that steel tonic, and take fencing lessons.

"Your affectionate wife,

"CHARLOTTE TWACORBIE.

"P.S.—Spalding has just been in to say that he and Danby wish to get married this day month! What could be more tiresome? I begged him to reconsider it, but he said it was too late. He had made up his mind.

"P.S. No. 2.—Ventry has given me to understand that he proposed to Teresa this afternoon, and that she seemed quite annoyed. He is furious, and blames ME. I dare not tell him about Wiche."

EPILOGUE.

Spoken by a Daughter of Eve, who is weeping, and an Angel, who looks out of fashion.

THE ANGEL.

This is only sorrow
For To-Day.
Life begins To-Morrow!

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

So they say.

THE ANGEL.

Life with love and laughter
Gay and free—
Yet no heartache after.

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

Can it be?

THE ANGEL.

Life with work that reaches
To the sky;
Life that never teaches
How to die.
Life that is eternal,
Ever young,

Ever bright and vernal
Just begun!

A Daughter of Eve.

Will To-Morrow ever dawn?
Shall we wake that golden morn
But to see
All the treasures gained by tears,
All the faith that's won by fears—
Vanity?

The Angel.

Doubter, look behind thee
In the past,
All the dreams that pleased thee
Did one last?
Is a wish remaining
From thy youth?
This thou art retaining
If 'twas truth.
Mortal passions sicken,
Fade away—
Love alone can quicken
Earthly clay.
Faith, and all endeavour
That is pure,
Hope, and Love, for ever
These endure.
All things else are folly
To the wise,—
Quit thy melancholy
And thy sighs!

The Gresham Press.

UNWIN BROTHERS,

CHILWORTH AND LONDON.

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